Critical Possibilities: Engaging and Nurturing Feminist Perspectives in Social Care and Social Work Education

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Critical Possibilities: Engaging and Nurturing Feminist Perspectives in Social Care and Social Work Education

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports a qualitative study that employed feminist research methodologies to explore the value of engaging with, and nurturing feminist perspectives in a social care/work education context. Undergraduate students were recruited to engage in a piece of feminist action research whereby a feminist classroom was established. This space attempted to enact feminist pedagogical strategies, and engage the students acting as participants with a range of feminist debates and concepts. Feminism was chosen as the focus for a number of reasons, not least because of my allegiance to it as both a researcher and a teacher. More specifically, it was regarded as a critical perspective and praxis that could support social care/work students to more fully understand and apply the social justice and human rights mandates that guide these areas of work. Anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices are regarded as essential for effective practice in work with users of care services, and it is my contention that feminism can make an important contribution to this. Neoliberal agendas operating in public services and education settings are diluting understanding of these vital topics. Therefore, a further aim of the research was to resist this and reclaim critical spaces in social care/work education.

Data collection methods were focus groups, interviews and reflective journals. Data analysis was via use of the Listening Guide. Three overarching narratives emerged from this analysis; these were labelled as 'Awakenings and Transformations', 'Care and Nurture' and 'Resistance and Defiance'. All three support my claim that the aims of the project have been achieved as they indicate participants' growing awareness of feminism, and willingness to identify with it as a means to support better care practices, and challenge oppressive and unjust perspectives.

The work has contributed knowledge about feminist pedagogy in general, and its relevance to social care/work education in particular. Contributions to feminist theory and feminist research methodologies have been made as I offer a new authorial voice to these bodies of work. Additionally, strategies to resist neoliberalism both inside and outside the academy have been offered.

THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is centred on and concerned with key themes of teaching, feminism, and social care/work. Engagement with these themes is necessarily expansive, and there is much that connects them to one another, not least me as researcher. I am a Senior Lecturer in Social Care, a position I have held for almost six years. However, I have been a teacher for more than twenty-five years, and a feminist for almost four decades. This study combines these elements and involves examination of my efforts to employ feminist insights and perspectives to my current teaching context in a higher education organisation. Therefore, this PhD thesis reports a qualitative study that adopted and adapted feminist research methodologies in order to explore the value of feminist perspectives in undergraduate social care and social work teaching and learning contexts.

From the beginning of this project, the one and only thing I was certain about was my desire to make feminism central to my work. Identifying myself as a feminist means that my work in academia is shaped by and imbued with feminism. Key areas of debate and concern as I moulded this project were around the value of feminist perspectives in teaching generally, and in social care/work teaching specifically. Additionally, I wanted to better understand the entanglements entailed when trying to embody feminism in a higher education context. Such contexts are increasingly dictated to by neoliberal agendas, so I was also interested to examine whether there was a place for feminism in current universities, and if there is, what that place might be and how it might look.

Phillips and Pugh (2015) assert that a PhD is firmly the responsibility of the candidate, and under the management of the candidate, therefore as a candidate I have made the choice to locate feminism at the heart of my work. I must take responsibility for this. In chapter one my connections to feminism will be thoroughly explored in order to defend this choice. This first chapter is a scene setting one that gives context to the study by interrogating my engagement with feminism. In so doing, it will shed light on how feminism came to be central to the work reported here, and how it has informed the trajectory of the study. This first

chapter is reflexive as my subjectivities are explored in order to be transparent about the values, beliefs, experiences, and social locations shaping the research. It serves as an introduction to the project, but also has elements of autoethnography. Autoethnographic writing helps readers to make sense of the experiences shared in the writing in order to 'analyse and understand personal experience as part of a larger social and political system' (van Amsterdam, 2015: 270). Consequently, this first chapter is both process and product, as it will offer insights whilst also synthesising an extensive range of literature that documents feminism as a perspective and explores its many and various debates.

A word on language will be useful at this juncture. I employ the word "feminism" not as an exclusionary category but as a discursive term (Scharff, 2012), which can hold many, and sometimes contradictory meanings. I am fully aware 'there is no single, unitary feminist perspective' (La France, 1988: 65) and there never has been. There are many different feminist positions, and those advocated are closely related to the traditions in which it was lodged or from which it emerged (Elshtain, 1996). My use of "feminism" as a singular term, therefore, is not to denote it has only one form, and elide, assimilate or homogenise differences. I use it for personal preference, as I believe its use as a singular term can be more aesthetically pleasing in some written contexts, and can provide it with a solidity, which I interpret as giving it more power and meaning. Similarly, when I write about teaching contexts, there will be times when I will use the terms "feminist pedagogy" or "feminist classroom" rather than "feminist pedagogies" and "feminist classrooms".

Chapter two is where feminist pedagogies are discussed. Reflexivity is evident in this chapter too in recognition that our social locations and personal experiences of power and oppression shape who we are, and therefore are not denied when we are in the classroom as teachers, indeed they impact on the relationships we develop with students and colleagues (De Santis and Serafini, 2015). This chapter also serves as a literature review, as here I explore theories, concepts and perspectives from the extensive literature on feminist pedagogies, that has been developed by many authors in a range of locations, and over a number of decades (Culley, 1985; hooks, 1989; Shrewsbury, 1987; Omolade, 1993; Forrest

and Rosenberg, 1997; Webb et al., 2002; Huckaby, 2013; Light et al., 2015; Aneja, 2017; Crawford and Jackson-Best, 2017; Vivakaran and Maraimalai, 2017; Epstein et al., 2018; Henderson, 2019). I drew on much of this work as I established a feminist classroom with 3 different cohorts of students over a two-year period. To recruit students to the project I targeted those studying on a BA Social Care programme (the course I was teaching on at the time of the study), with ambitions to progress to postgraduate social work training courses. For a successful application to social work training, students needed to demonstrate a sophisticated insight into the values and ethical principles, which are at the heart of the social work profession (British Association of Social Workers (BASW), 2014). A commitment to promoting social justice is central to social work practice; their connection is fundamental (Fenton, 2014), as is the necessity to work in anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive ways with service users (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2019).

As my research aims were focussed around supporting students to develop better knowledge and understanding of how structural inequalities shape all our lives creating social injustices, and how feminism can make a significant contribution to illuminating and challenging this, our aspirations coincided. Students would get support with their postgraduate application process, and I had potential recruits for my study to achieve the following aims:

1. Engage students with feminist perspectives and debates in order to offer some resistance to neoliberalism's dilution of structural inequalities and their impact on people's lives.

2. Support social care and social work students to engage with feminist perspectives as a means to foster critical thinking, which could then translate into more effective practice with service users, by supporting better understanding of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory perspectives.

3. Set up a feminist classroom in the context of my work in order to achieve 1 and 2 above.

4. Advance feminist thinking and contribute a feminist narrative by adding my story to the existing literature.

The reciprocity I established with students as our ideas coincided was essential to the project, as it represented an attempt to realise feminist pedagogical and feminist research principles (Webb et al., 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014; Rizvi, 2019). Making a practical difference to participants' lives is, as Bloom and Sawin (2009) argue, a criterion for evaluating feminist research practice. I believe I have achieved this as all participants who applied, were successful in their interviews for postgraduate social work training, and many are now practicing social workers.

A key question for all feminist teachers relates to what the relationship between teaching and activism is (Lacey and Smits, 2015). I consider the work for this thesis an example of feminist activism, as it has contributed to a social change, and Louise-Lawrence (2014) also argues that the feminist classroom is a site of feminist activism, indeed, she says, it is the frontline. Zhang (2018) has also discussed teaching about feminism as slow activism, claiming it can represent an important means to create fundamental changes to sanitised neoliberal dogma by highlighting structural issues. It is vital in my view, to connect academic feminism to political action, and I believe I have made a contribution to this end with this project.

After a period of time working together in the feminist spaces we had established, students took part in focus groups and interviews, the products of which I used as data. In addition, all participants (I include myself here) kept a reflective journal, which was also a source of data for the project. Chapter three discusses the methodological aspects of the study, giving necessary detail on the research processes employed, and the epistemological and ontological considerations relevant to the study. This chapter also explicates the doing of the research, and my application of feminist action research principles as students and I established a feminist classroom. As supporting social justice and social transformations can be listed as goals of feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2014), applying feminist research principles to this work served as apposite. This chapter will therefore

also offer examination of feminist research principles and how they were formulated and applied in the study.

In chapter four I discuss how I analysed the data. I used the Listening Guide as a method of data analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Woodcock, 2016; Woodiwiss et al., 2017). This is an intensive approach to qualitative data analysis, which allows a researcher to attend to each participant's multiple layers of communication (Forrest et al., 2015). Application of the various steps of this method requires repeated engagement with data in order to listen in different ways (Woodcock, 2016; Gilligan and Eddy, 2017). From this deep engagement with the experiences shared by students as participants in the study, I identified three overarching narratives across all data sets.

These overarching narratives framed the contributions of the participants, and are discussed separately in chapters five, six, and seven. I have termed these 3 narratives: 'Awakenings and Transformations', 'Care and Nurture', and 'Resistance and Defiance.' In each of these chapters, participants' contributions are presented and discussed in relation to relevant theories, research and concepts from literature, as I worked towards a fuller examination of my findings. The overarching narratives I have identified, and labelled as above, helped me to give shape to the experiences shared by participants. Inevitably, in the process of analysis some contributions will be lost or subsumed (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998), I could not avoid this. However, in reporting the findings I made an effort to include all participants in these chapters (albeit to varying degrees) to enhance the visibility of all contributors. By force of circumstance some participants feature more than others, they had more to say, or were more enthusiastic about the project and so participated in more data collection opportunities.

The thesis ends with a final chapter framed as a reflexive undertaking. I discuss reflexivity and examine how it influenced each stage of the research. As I do this, I revisit my research journey in order to articulate how the various strands of the thesis fit together into a coherent discussion. This final chapter is further used as an opportunity to explore my personal positionality and its role in the research. This chapter also outlines the key contestations and debates this thesis has engaged with. In this discussion, it is made explicit how each chapter of the

thesis builds my argument as I worked to achieve the research aims. Limitations of the study are acknowledged in this chapter before a discussion is offered on its contribution to knowledge and where future work could place its focus.

CHAPTER 1 - Positioning my Feminist Subjectivities: Establishing the Context to the Thesis

1.1 Chapter Introduction

Making one's position in relation to knowledge transparent is an element of feminist and other critical theories. Consequently, reflecting on lived experiences in order to situate one's work and research in one's own narratives is a key feature in the work of many feminist research practitioners (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010; Harding, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Nyachae, 2016). To do so requires practicing reflexivity, a key process in feminist research '…whereby researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice' (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 17). Researchers articulating their experiences and sharing their narratives is an attempt to show how knowledge is socially situated and rooted in our individual experiences (Harding, 2004, 2012). As Ahmed (2017a) showed, feminist theory is generated from our everyday experiences of living a feminist life. In addition, and importantly, this historicising of my locations and relations is in my view an act of resistance, as it is, as Rohrer (2018) also notes, antithetical to abstract neoliberalism and its efforts to deny historical, material and structural conditions. Giraud (2015) and Mackinlay (2016) make a similar argument as they discuss how they navigated neoliberal based hierarchies in their universities in order to incorporate feminist insights into their teaching and academic practices. Therefore, taking a steer from them, in this first chapter of the thesis, I will set the scene by interrogating my own multiple subjectivities in order to explore the ways the research I report here has developed and been shaped.

My exploration begins by discussing some of the difficulties encountered as definitions of feminism are sought, it then moves into a reflection on how my feminist subjectivities have emerged, developed, been constructed and reconstructed. I offer my situated experiences and knowledge as I discuss my relationship with feminism. I give you my 'her story'. When offering these situated experiences, I link them to key trends in the development of feminism in order to explore some of its key debates, examine its historical development, and

position my own claims about feminism and myself as a feminist in this context. In doing all of this, the chapter aims to also come to a fuller position about what feminism offers this thesis, my practice as a teacher and researcher, and the students/participants I work with in these roles. However, an important caveat must be presented here, and that is that this chapter is not aiming to distil centuries of work and ideas into a definitive account of feminism. It is written within certain parameters and stringent constraints, as required by the nature of PhD study. This entails me making strategic choices as I progress.

1.2 Defining Feminism – what am I claiming to be?

Feminism is difficult to define; it is '…hard to pin down.' (Delmar, 1986:13), and a straightforward definition seems elusive (Phillips and Cree, 2014). Indeed, it is possible to argue that there has never been a definition that has achieved full consensus. Furthermore, difficulties faced in achieving a definition of feminism are intensified as in answering the basic questions of "What is feminism?" and "What /who is a feminist?" 'Everyone seems to have different answers, and every answer is infused with a political and emotional charge' (Offen, 1988:119).

"Feminism" is a celebrated word in some quarters, in others anachronistic, boring, contested, even feared and despised. For Kingston (2018) it is a polarising word, and as Zelinger (2012:113) notes, it 'can be kind of alienating'. Thus, agreeing on a meaning therefore encompasses traversing disparate, and at times contrasting practices, philosophies, and theoretical perspectives, so that '…positions in stark contradiction to each other are equally argued in the name of "feminism", with little hope of resolution' (Thompson, 2001:5). This can sometimes lead to an impasse where '…feminists are profoundly and at times bitterly divided, not only over political priorities and methods, but also over goals' (Bryson, 1999:5). However, some threshold must and can be set, and a baseline definition, which can be agreed upon in a general sense is possible (Delmar, 1986; Woodward and Woodward, 2009; McCann and Kim, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Attempts to define it whilst also acknowledging the difficulties entailed in giving it definition, include the following:

> '… at the very least a feminist is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unjustified, and that satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change (some would say a revolution even) in the social, economic and political order. But beyond that, things immediately become more complex' (Delmar, 1986:8).

> 'Feminism embodies many theories rather than being a single discrete theory, and rather than being a politically coherent approach to the subordination of women, is a political commitment - or in some of its forms more an ethical commitment- to giving women their true value' (Wilson and Weir, 1986:8).

> 'Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' (hooks, 2000:1).

> '… cognizance of the hierarchical nature of gender relations, which locates males in a superior position to females' (Hebert, 2007:33).

> 'Feminism emphasizes the importance of the social, political and economic structures that shape human societies and stresses that gender must be considered when examining the effects of oppression and domination and power and powerlessness in our society' (Turner and Maschi, 2015:151).

Having made feminism central to my work, achieving some baseline principles about feminism was necessary as I pursued this project. The definitions presented above assisted me, they span almost four decades, and give a sense of some of the key areas of tension and challenge that exist in feminist debates. Are all women disadvantaged in relation to all men? Is feminism a singular perspective or multiple perspectives? Is it a unified perspective that can be described via a singular adjective? Is feminism about commonalities between

women or differences? Does feminism deny differences between women? Is feminism a woman only space? Does feminism enact its own forms of exclusion? These are some of the thorny questions feminism has faced and still faces. I wrestled with many of these too as I worked to embody feminism in the doing of this research, and I discuss them more as this thesis develops.

Addressing these questions and the many others that exist is probably more important than fixing on a definition. Consequently, many writers keep their attempts at definition broad. They argue that feminism is diffuse activity, it has many contradictions, it can be proactive, and reactive, and '…takes its meanings from the moment.' (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986:4), it is paradoxical (Cott, 1986), 'deeply contradictory' (Ramazanoglu, 1993:5), and as Kamla Bhasin said in a discussion about feminism's intergenerational appeals, 'feminism is like water. It's everywhere but it takes the shape of the container into which it is poured' (Bhasin, 2014: 25).

Feminism is, therefore, dynamically constituted, which means it adapts, and a number of different schools of gender analysis coexist under its umbrella. It is:

> '… a double-edged project involving both the critique of existing definitions, representations, and theorizations of women and also the creation of new images for female subjectivity and suitable social representations of it' (Braidotti, 1989:90).

The various forms in which it manifests itself contribute to its strength as:

> '… feminism's heterogeneity is its greatest strength and the key to its survival and perpetuation in the face of forces which try to erode its credibility in increasingly devious ways' (Whelehan, 1995: 20).

1.3 My Feminist Beginnings

I have identified myself as a feminist for almost four decades, and my adoption of the feminist label has been a largely positive experience. It brings challenges, some of which are substantive; however, I join with Dale Spender who affirmed:

> 'My choice of feminism was a logical one, a deliberate decision on my part to improve the quality of my life. I selected feminism as a way of life, as a value system and a means of explaining the world and my place within it…' (Spender, 1986: 208).

Feminism was a conscious decision on my part too. I engaged with feminism as a young woman in the 1980s, believing it offered me a means to gain self-esteem and confidence. Feminism shifted my worldview, it reassured me that I did not have to accept things as they are, and I could challenge, and ask questions. I might not always be listened to, but at least I did not have to take a passive, and subservient role. Swirsky and Angelone (2016:447) argue many self-identifying feminists have personally experienced or been exposed to sexism and so '…gravitate toward the feminist movement as a way to validate their experiences.'

I first came across feminism in an A Level Sociology class, where Ann Oakley's work on housework was introduced to me (Oakley, 1974). Later as an undergraduate on a Psychology degree, reading Carol Gilligan's work helped me feel less isolated in the discipline, and when she identified that psychological theorists '…tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth' (Gilligan, [1982] 1993:6), I immediately grasped her arguments. In the 1980s as a working class girl of Irish descent, I felt I had few options when disappointment with my choice of Psychology as an undergraduate degree subject set in. I tried to change course, but persevered with the discipline, graduated, and later enrolled for a part-time Masters course in Applied Psychology. It was here I had an epiphany when I was introduced to Feminist Psychology. Being exposed to feminist arguments whilst studying as a postgraduate was truly enlightening and liberating. From this study, I learned that I could 'do psychology' (Burman, 1990: 7) whilst also engaging in feminist critique, this was a revelation to me. Jane

Ussher's reflection on her undergraduate studies in Psychology gave me great heart when she asked:

> 'How many budding psychologists go into the discipline with the misconception that it is about people, perhaps about women, only to find themselves immersed in an undergraduate syllabus which concentrates on topics such as perception, learning, memory and meta-cognition, at the expense of anything more directly human?' (Ussher, 1990: 47).

Like Ussher I decided to 'not throw the baby out with the bathwater' (Ussher, 1990:47), I was determined to stick with the discipline, train to teach it, and bring the work of feminist psychologists to the awareness of students as part of a feminist campaign to bring feminist analysis to the discipline of Psychology in order to have ' … a direct effect on the future of psychology in Britain as we become accepted as 'real' psychologists' (Ussher, 1990: 60). This thesis is testimony that this desire to share feminist perspectives with students still lives on.

I realised then that I needed feminism to support me, give me succour, and embolden me. It is not surprising to some that education should provide a space for politicisation and a call to activism. Feminism's and other political movements' histories in the West has been shaped by strong relationships with university and academic life (Hennessy, 1993). More recently Guest (2016) discussed the importance of education to the experience of becoming a feminist. The connection and intersection between educational spaces and feminist activity is of course central to this thesis, as an aim is to examine how feminist perspectives can support better understanding of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory perspectives amongst social care and social work students. A fuller discussion on what these perspectives mean and represent in social care and social work contexts is offered in chapter 3 as I discuss how I established feminist classrooms with participants in this study.

As a consequence of my own educational experiences, I decided that feminist activity was necessary in order to realise the goals of gender equality and gender

justice. I took this perspective with me to my work in mental health services, and later to my teaching roles when I moved to work in education. In both of these contexts, my work with women as service users and students provided further support to my view that gender activism remains a necessary goal. I concurred with Lynne Segal who defended her feminism by reminding her readers that inequalities still mar the lives of many women.

> 'Why feminism? Because its most radical goal, both personal and collective, has yet to be realized: a world which is a better place not just for some women, but for all women' (Segal, 1999:232).

This was the situation as Lynne Segal saw it two decades ago, however, support for the claim that feminism's goals are still to be achieved comes regularly, and has come too from more recent authors who have staked a claim for feminist projects to have a place in the twenty first century. Woodward and Woodward (2009) for example, discussed how the everyday experiences of women are shaped by sexism, arguing that investing in feminist thinking can support different generations of women to give voice to their experiences.

Banyard (2010) also argued that feminism is still an urgent and relevant social justice campaign, and claimed equality is an illusion. Bhattacharjya et al., (2013) highlighted that even in social justice movements, women's rights and gender justice struggle for equal billing in terms of priorities as areas for change. den Boer (2015) looked globally and argued that a more gender equitable world is required. She referred to how women in the West are still restricted by gender stereotypes in the home, the market, and education, while many women in developing countries lack basic freedoms. Miriam E. David asserted:

> 'There has been an increase in patriarchy, sexism, misogyny in various media, particularly with the rise of social media - the 'selfie' generation - within a sharply competitive global economy' (David, 2016:1).

All of these authors pointed to the need for feminist campaigns, reminding us of the key areas for activity. Their concerns were affirmed in 2017 when the 'Me

Too' movement gained support and momentum as people from all facets of society were encouraged to use social media, (Twitter in particular), to reveal experiences of sexual harassment and assault (Zacharias, 2018). This 'Me Too' movement was and is the latest iteration of African American Tarana Burke's movement, which originated in response to Black girls' stories about their experiences of sexual violence (Brewer and Dundes, 2018; Brockes, 2018; Kingston, 2018). The 'Me Too' campaigns, combined with Donald Trump becoming the President of the United States in 2016, have led to a resurgence of feminist activity and increasing numbers of people in North America engaging with its philosophies (Reger, 2017; Kingston, 2018). The 'Me Too' movement has become a global project as women and men from many other countries have come forward to share their stories of sexual violence (Burke, 2018).

Consequently, feminism remains a pertinent project. Currently it is enjoying a new 'cultural luminosity' (Wood and Litherland, 2018: 905) as it is being more accepted, and gaining popularity (Aune, 2018), albeit with many of the same sets of contradictions and challenges it has always faced. For example, Ringrose (2013: 79) recognises there is still an expectation for women to inhabit 'unitary, non-contradictory subjectivity.'. Gill (2016) warns that we should not become complacent about how feminism is currently being celebrated; she advises that it is premature to believe this new visibility for feminism can be sustained, especially if critical debates such as those about postfeminism are displaced. David (2016:5) adds her voice too, claiming this resurgence in feminism '… is often engulfed by misogyny.' In terms of this project, this revival of feminism's popularity is interesting, as in the early days of the project, claims that we are in a postfeminist era resulted in much self-doubt about the focus of my research. Reaction to my focus from many quarters referred to postfeminist claims about how gender equality was solved, as:

> 'Postfeminist literature positions women's issues in such a way that they are discursively silenced, framing gender as already solved through the liberal feminism of the 1970s' (Midkiff, 2015:377).

Beard (2017) claimed that the mechanisms for silencing women are deeply embedded in Western culture. The neoliberal higher education environment in which I am working is one such mechanism and brings many challenges for feminists too; these will be discussed in more detail in my next chapter, where feminist pedagogy is explored. To conclude this part of this chapter I say I have not chosen silence in response to such challenges; I have persevered with my focus, as my connections to feminism are deeply entrenched, as the next section demonstrates. I now outline and interrogate my connections to feminism as I discuss some key points in its evolution. Through this I come to a fuller exposition of what feminism offers this thesis.

1.4 My Connections to Early Feminists in Suffrage Campaigns (1840s – 1920s)

Living in Manchester connects me in an emotional way to the struggle for suffrage that was fought by nineteenth century campaigners, such as the Pankhurst family. In the 1980s my burgeoning feminism found much solace and comfort from visits to the Pankhurst centre, as I read and engaged with the artefacts there. I was able at subsequent points, to use this knowledge as part of my teaching, to support students to recognise the importance of this early feminist activity. This is further evidence of my commitment to feminist pedagogical pursuits, which this thesis interrogates.

These nineteenth century campaigners have retrospectively been called 'First Wave Feminists'. This term is used to reflect the first concerted movement aimed at reforming the social and legal inequalities faced by Western women in the nineteenth century (Gamble, 2001; Turner and Maschi, 2015). They were of course not the first feminists; many women had prior to this challenged their subservient position. The difference here was that the activities of these women conveyed the start of a mass movement (Whelehan, 1995). Their campaign for women's suffrage began in the mid-1800s and ended in 1945 (Burns and Chantler, 2011). During this period, basic rights had to be fought for:

> ‘These feminists were primarily concerned with establishing in policy that women are human beings in their own right and not the property of men’ (Gray and Boddy, 2010: 369).

Believing that women were more virtuous, and embodied a higher form of being, their aim was to bring women’s influence into men’s domains (Phillips and Cree, 2014). A belief in biological determinism and adherence to essentialist ideas about women and men shaped some of the beliefs and arguments of nineteenth century campaigners (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005). Later feminists in the twentieth century challenged such ontological positions (de Beauvoir, 1953), I will return to this debate later in this chapter. Many of the goals of these earlier activists were achieved, with the support of men, which for some leads to an interesting discussion about who can be a feminist, pro-feminist or feminist-ally. Indeed, John Stuart Mill was a key nineteenth century campaigner for equality between women and men (Walters, 2005; Banyard, 2010).

Enfranchising women with legal and political rights righted the wrongs of an institutionally inequitable system. As a result, I feel I owe a great debt to these early feminists and have a responsibility to ensure their efforts were not in vain. They have bequeathed to me and others the right to vote, I ensure I exercise that right, and every time I vote in UK elections (General and Local) I am conscious of the work of women in the Women’s Social and Political Union.

Suffrage was not the only site for campaigning; it can also be argued that the development of social work owes a debt to these early feminists. Social work too has a key place in this thesis, as my work for this study began as a means to support students to achieve their ambition to qualify as social workers. The liberal reform programmes of the late 1800s, which aimed to reconstruct family life to offer better protection to women and children, was consciously or unconsciously feminist action. Cree and Dean (2015) argued that early social work pioneers in the late 1900s and early twentieth century can be retrospectively described as feminists. Gordon (1986: 65) argues there has been a:

> '… thick and complex history of feminist involvement in … moral reform (anti-prostitution) and anti–alcohol movements, in progressive – era campaigns to reform the living and spending habits of the poor, in campaigns for industrial protective legislation and affirmative action …'

This social work and feminism connection will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter. Their connections are not just historical however, as in this instance, and many others, foregrounding the work of earlier female thinkers, campaigners, and activists, and retrospectively calling their work feminist was an important part of research practices by modern feminists in the 1960s and 1970s (Whelehan, 1995). This desire to connect with past generations of women was also evident in accounts of the development of feminism in the United States:

> 'Those of us who joined the Second Wave were eager to discover our foremothers and to this extent we had a historical consciousness' (Hewitt, 2012:658).

Equally important at this time, as Linda Nicholson points out, was the realisation that aspects of women's history needed to be told by women and not filtered through a male interpretation (Nicholson, 2010). Indeed, 'her story' as opposed to 'his story' was a key element of 1960s feminism, as the need to develop new narratives about issues around women's inequalities was realised.

A further and important example of women connecting with their foremothers can be seen in bell hooks' book '*Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism'* (hooks, 1981). The title acknowledges Sojourner Truth's '*Ain't I a Woman?'* speech from 1851. Sojourner Truth was an antislavery campaigner who at an antislavery women's convention in Ohio, USA, took to the platform to make a plea for women's rights too. Sojourner Truth was a former slave, who reacted with justifiable anger, when after the emancipation of slaves, and former slaves were given the vote, this applied only to male slaves (Gamble, 2001; Walters, 2005; Turner and Maschi, 2015). Her question challenged any concept of an essential and universal 'woman's nature' (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005); this was

a debate that later feminists would also engage in. A later part of this chapter examines this in more detail.

Historical accounts, such as those above, of the nineteenth century activities, were attractive to some modern feminists as they provided reassurance and a more satisfying portrait of women working in a united fashion (Delmar, 1986). However, to present this early feminist activity as a unified, coherent and entirely positive narrative is of course artifice. The Pankhurst family itself experienced many differences of opinion based on their diverse political views and attitudes (Pugh, 2013). Virginia Woolf, who many consider a key feminist campaigner, and whose work is often lauded by feminists, especially her 'Three Guineas' (Woolf, [1938] 1986) and 'A Room of One's Own' (Woolf, 1929) which laments the lack of space and opportunities that exist in patriarchal culture for women to give voice to their ideas, did not like the word feminism (Walters, 2005). Indeed, according to Offen (1988) she attempted to kill it in the 1930s by symbolically incinerating its written representation.

Additionally, Octavia Hill, who for some has the status as a founder of modern social work, was an anti-suffragist (Bush, 2007). With the lens offered by twenty first century debates it is possible to describe this early feminism as '…oblivious to its classist, homophobic and at times racist underpinnings' (Phillips and Cree, 2014: 936). This tendency to obfuscation when presenting the history of feminism is one reason why Linda Nicholson rejects the much-used wave metaphor and argues it has outlived its usefulness. She argues it had strategic historical value in the past but should now be discarded and replaced by a kaleidoscope metaphor which better reflects the complexity of the history of gender activism, and its multiple and shifting configurations (Nicholson, 2010). The wave metaphor can also misrepresent the trajectory of feminism as a linear narrative of a single and unified agenda; this too is not an accurate characterisation (Aikau et al., 2003; Woodward and Woodward, 2009; Kingston, 2018). Segal (1999) also cautioned us against offering a simple reading of the various periods in feminist activism and theory, and Mann and Huffman (2005) point out that debates are rarely as simple as reconstructions suggest. As an attempt to remedy, Hewitt (2012) advocates recasting the wave metaphor as

radio waves with different frequencies or wavelengths. This, she argues would permit an examination of the range of signals and echoes that combined and co-existed in feminism's history. The wave metaphor, has historical significance, but needs modifications (Molony and Nelson, 2017). Crossley (2017:20) suggests a concept of waveless feminism arguing that 'feminism has been not a series of disconnected upsurges but a continuous flow.' Finally, as Reger (2017) notes, the wave metaphor has proven to have resilience, and it can have resonance with people's experiences, but is also reductive as it can package stereotypes and ignore the diversity in feminisms. Such paradoxes are evident in many feminist debates, and make for fertile and invigorating discussions, hence:

> 'It is important to note that the waves of feminism are not separate and necessarily different but may be distinctive in responding to the wider sociopolitical and economic contexts' (David 2016: ix).

Notwithstanding the important critiques of early feminism, and my realisation that on many fronts I would have little in common with Emmeline Pankhurst, especially politically, as she was selected for parliament as a candidate for the Conservative Party in 1927, there is no doubt in my mind that I benefitted from the actions and accomplishments of these pioneering nineteenth century women. Their stories also reflect the complexity and twist and turns of feminism, that I grappled with as I shaped this thesis, and more of this will be explored as this chapter develops.

Valuing the contributions and achievements of past feminists is something that is often absent in the work of many post 1990s feminists. Indeed, the so-called "postfeminists" have been charged with taking for granted the achievements of earlier feminists (Gray and Boddy, 2010). Dismantling and eradicating the work of modern feminists from the 1960s to the 1980s has been part of the feminism of some twenty first century feminists (McRobbie, 2009). Some postfeminists view earlier work to be naïve and simplistic at best, exclusionary, extreme and embarrassing at worst. Consequently, most of their writing is pitted against modern feminists as they argue they are offering a more knowing form of feminism (Woodward and Woodward, 2009; Lewis, 2014). Postfeminism is

entwined with neoliberalism (Scharff, 2014; Gill, 2016) and this relationship has impacted on this study too, as I will discuss in chapter 5 where I explore how reluctance to engage with feminism can be understood with reference to neoliberal postfeminist debates that undermine the necessity of feminist perspectives. For now, a fuller discussion of the ideas that proved to be an anathema to some 1990s feminists will be examined in the next section.

1.5 Feminism in the 1960s – 1980s

In the1960s feminism was waking up after a sleep of 40 years, or a period of quiescence, as creating a stable society took precedence in the post-World War Two period (David, 2016). At the start of this reestablishment of feminist ideas and ambitions, there was a desire to continue the struggle started in the late nineteenth century. Despite achieving the vote and having educational opportunities that earlier feminists had craved and struggled for:

> '… by the early 1960s, women remained subordinate to men in all walks of life … women still felt relatively excluded from political, public and social life' (David, 2016:35).

The reawakened feminist action to address the continued state of inequalities has been described as 'The second peak of a feminist movement that has existed for more than 100 years' (Dahlerup, 1986:2). Many people have also applied the term 'Second Wave Feminism' as a descriptor of feminist activity in this period (Evans, 1995; Mann and Huffman, 2005; Burns and Chantler, 2010; Gray and Boddy, 2010; Evans and Chamberlain, 2015; Turner and Maschi, 2015; David, 2016). Notwithstanding the concerns about a wave metaphor I alluded to earlier, these writers, and others have used the wave narrative to chart the chronological and ideological development of feminism. Using the term 'Second Wave' in the 1960s, served as an important reminder to feminists that they are continuing the work of earlier groups of women, and that their campaigns '…had a venerable past… were part of a long tradition of activism' (Nicholson, 2010:49).

The term was coined by Marsha Lear as a reference to the increased feminist activity that was seen in Europe, Britain and the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Gamble, 2001). These wave models have been critiqued further by Chakraborty (2007) for their Eurocentrism, for privileging contributions to feminist politics from white Western women over other groups of women. Conscious of this important critique, I therefore, as I continue my story, try to avoid this metaphor but when it is unavoidable (omitting it may make the sentence cumbersome), I use inverted commas, to reflect that I use the terms but am aware they are problematic for a number of reasons.

I was a child when this modern or second peak of feminism was at its inception, when feminists in the West involved themselves in campaigns for reproductive rights, protection against rape and domestic violence, rights to education, and employment opportunities. From a Western perspective this was the era of civil rights, women's rights, and social democracy (David, 2016). I strongly feel I owe a debt to these women too, as their actions have had direct benefit to my life. For example, in the decade I was born, the 1960s, female participation in higher education as fulltime students was only 25%; by 2013 it had more than doubled to 54% (Willetts, 2013 in David, 2016: 28).

1.6 Strands in Modern Feminism

A common way (amongst many white Western writers) of characterising the development of modern feminism that was the backdrop of my childhood is to discuss how three main tendencies developed in the women's movement in the 1970s (Watkins et al., 1992; Whelehan, 1995; Charles and Hughes–Freeland, 1996; Hebert, 2007; David, 2016). These three strands were radical feminism, socialist (Marxist) feminism and Liberal feminism. Radical feminists saw patriarchy as the problem; and resolved that the power of men over women must be challenged. Women only campaigns were the best way to challenge this, in their view. In order to liberate women, a fundamental reordering of spheres of society was required by those who aligned themselves with this perspective (Ruzek, 1986). Socialist (Marxist) feminists linked women's struggles to class struggles and saw the over throwing of capitalism as the best route to women's

liberation. In this perspective women joining with other oppressed groups and fighting together, was considered to be the way to effect change. Raising awareness of how the dynamics of industrial capitalism contribute to women's challenges is sought in this perspective (Ruzek, 1986). Liberal feminists gave emphasis to the right to choose and sought not to overthrow the system but to reform it to one that would offer more equal rights. Their goal was to enjoy the same rights as men, and for women to be acknowledged as rational beings (St Pierre, 2000).

Despite their different ideas about where the emphasis should sit, each type of feminist still shared the grand narrative about the "truth" of women's oppression (Morley and Macfarlane, 2012). The 1960s and 1970s saw feminism expand, as there was 'the development of global theories of patriarchy as the fundamental form of oppression which was thought to unite women throughout the world' (Weedon 1999:26). This feminism was built on a liberal humanist notion of a 'conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject' (Weedon, 1987:21). As part of a humanist project, feminism at this time assumed women's oppression was universal; this "fact" is sometimes referred to as a "grand theory". The grand theory was shared but answers as to how to resolve it differed amongst the different types of feminists. Later feminists challenged these taken for granted theories and narratives, and posited the subject as discontinuous and fragmented, rather than unitary and fixed (Charles, 1996; Mani, 2013). A fuller discussion of this critique by 1990s poststructuralist feminists is offered later in this chapter.

In a development to this historical account giving, Becky Thompson contends that accounts of so-called 'Second Wave Feminism' ignore the multiracial feminism of this period. Calling it 'hegemonic feminism' (Thompson, 2002:56), she argues that portrayals of the 'Second Wave' marginalise the activism undertaken by women of colour. In particular, she contests that white feminists do not have a monopoly on the term "radical feminism", and she calls for a more expansive look at feminism's history to include movements such as those for civil rights, Black Power and the New Left who have contributed to the "radical" status. This is a further example of why it is hard to offer a coherent narrative of feminism; to do

so also invites accusations of bias, evasion and dishonesty. Further discussion of this critique of hegemonic feminism will be offered later in this chapter, when I look at the critique presented by Black feminists. This critique challenged the exclusivity embedded in definitions of "woman" and argued such feminism does not speak for all women (Ahmed, 1998). I engage again with this critique in chapter 5 also when I discuss how some of the Black participants in this study were less inclined towards feminism as a means to support them, and as a useful prism from which to explore inequalities.

When I became a feminist in the 1980s the so-called 'grand theory' of feminism was well established, it resonated with my view of the world then, and I subscribed to its viewpoint and vision. At this time the dominant popular image of a feminist in Britain, was shaped by the encampment at Greenham Common. Here a community of women were demonstrating about nuclear bases on British soil. Of course, not all of this group and its supporters identified with feminism (Delmar, 1986), a further illustration of how any discourse has multiple positions, views, and a range of outcomes. Nevertheless, as a regular news story, I was kept informed of the camp's progress and was inspired to see women campaigning for their beliefs. At this time, I self-identified as a white, working class, Irish descent woman, but my concerns about my gender overrode my other subjectivities. I identified with this group on the basis they were women, and I too was a woman. I felt more keenly the injustices I faced based on gender inequalities, than those I faced due to my Irish heritage, and my class position. Gender was very much my starting point as I came to realise the impact of inequalities on my life and the lives of others.

However, I did engage with groups on the left of the political spectrum who were interested in advancing antiracist, social justice, and socialist agendas. Sadly, from this I often felt frustrated that the focus was very much on the 'male', and gender differences were marginalised at best, at worst ignored. Many other women have experienced this situation too; they also became frustrated with feeling secondary, and witnessing gender being marginalised. The following quote reflects a scenario I related to wholeheartedly in the 1980s:

> ‘Their disenchantment with the radical political movements of the ‘60s led them to believe that female subordination was more than just an effect of dominant political forces; it was endemic in all social relations with men’ (Whelehan, 1995:5).

As a consequence of my own disenchantment with other critical spaces I treated ‘sexism as the ultimate oppression’ (Thompson, 2002:56). Such a stance according to many Black feminists results in ignoring or giving less emphasis to race and class analyses (hooks, 1994, 2000; Thompson 2002). hooks (2000) therefore asserts that we should say “I advocate feminism” rather than “I am a feminist” in order to prevent the misconception that gender is given priority over race or class concerns. I accept this criticism, and there has been some reconstructing of my positions. The more intersectional views I give consideration to now will be explored in a subsequent section of this chapter. This reworking of feminist positions is further support for feminism’s dynamism, and the claims I presented earlier about difficulty defining it as it has abilities to be reactive, adaptive and responsive. This reworking is also a feature of what this thesis represents. The reflexive discussion framing chapter 8 gives a fuller insight into some of this repositioning and is a good illustration of this.

1.7 Analysing the Structures of Oppression and Establishing a Theory of Shared Oppression

Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s gave emphasis to analysing the structures of oppression (Gray and Boddy, 2010). Initially, as women came together, to share their individual stories, there was a realisation that many of their experiences were common. It must be said that also common amongst them was being a white middle class woman, as women of colour, Black women and working class women were not always part of these groups. This exclusion has been extensively discussed by authors such as hooks, (1981,1994), Spelman (1988), Collins (2000) and Zack (2005), and I return to this theme again later in this chapter.

As these groups of mostly, and in some cases totally, white middle class women, shared experiences of subordination, they realised their predicaments were not

the result of personal inadequacies and individual flaws; but were a result of social relations and the structure within which they lived. The slogan “the personal is the political” reflected the shared oppression of women (Charles, 1996; Gray and Boddy, 2010). Radical feminists used the slogan to draw attention to the politics of housework (Nicholson, 2010). In the 1970s feminists used it to reflect the ways in which patriarchy operated on an everyday and micro level in order for women to look to feminism as something that represented their own struggles (Woodward and Woodward, 2009). The slogan also served to challenge criticisms from liberals and U.S. left wing commentators that the problems feminists sought to address were personal, not political issues (McCann and Kim, 2013). A structuralist philosophy was at the heart of the views of both radical and socialist (Marxist) feminists using this slogan. Both saw women’s oppression as located in structures, be they patriarchal sex- gender systems or class structures. The problems being addressed were therefore not on a personal level only. This mantra lost popularity as the “post” debates and concepts I discuss in section 1.13 later, gained popularity, however, it has enjoyed a revival over recent years (Hekman, 2014).

As a structural theory (Morley and Macfarlane, 2012), and born out of a modernist discourse (Hennessy, 1993; Francis, 2000; Hirschman, 2004), feminism developed critiques of a range of systems that serve the needs of powerful groups at the expense of the liberation of those who are disempowered. Feminism at this time was also a humanist discourse, which means it talked of structures, binaries, categories, hierarchies, and ‘… grids of regularity that are not only linguistic but also very material’ (St Pierre and Pillow, 2000: 4). Analysing oppression in terms of structures and systems is important to this thesis. In the sessions with students, in our version of a feminist classroom, I discussed the existence of structural oppressions and emphasised that blame can be seen to lie with the social relations rather than the individual. I wanted to somehow stem the degrading of political thinking to the individual level of responsibility (McLaughlin, 2008). I was and remain in agreement with the views of critical social workers and researchers who believe:

> '… social work should be a practice with an ambition to challenge inequality, marginalization, and oppression at a structural level by using structural understandings of social problems' (Mattsson, 2014: 8).

It is my assertion that feminism can support social care and social work students to better understand the inequalities service users face because it:

> '… emphasizes the importance of the social, political and economic structures that shape human societies and stresses that gender must be considered when examining the effects of oppression and domination and power and powerlessness in our society…' (Turner and Maschi, 2015:151).

How I aimed to realise this in my work for this thesis is more fully outlined in the next chapter where I discuss feminist pedagogy**.** For now, I will continue my discussion of key moments and debates in feminism's history by exploring the relationship between feminism and social work. This relationship is significant in this work, as I am arguing for feminism to have a key place in social care and social work education. The relationship between feminism and social work, as the next section will outline, lost some of its potency as it too responded to fissures, critiques and tensions. However, there is hope it can be revitalised as many social work writers currently recognise the value of feminist perspectives (Cree and Dean, 2015; Wahab et al., 2015; Fraser and MacDougall, 2017; Mallinger et al., 2017; Epstein et al., 2018), and I presume to include myself as author of this thesis in this list too.

1.8 Developing and Using Feminist Knowledge in Social Work

A key area of success for feminism during the 1960s to the 1980s was the achievement of feminist academics. Women's Studies courses were developed in universities, and feminist academics such as Sandra Harding made important contributions to research methodology. A discussion about these achievements is better placed in other chapters of this thesis. Consequently, Women Studies courses are discussed in the feminist pedagogy chapter (chapter 2), and

contributions to research methodology are discussed in the methodology chapters (chapters 3 and 4).

Here I will discuss how many feminist social workers made use of feminist knowledge that was developing at this time and used it to support their practice. Cree and Dean (2015) assert that in the 1980s and 1990s feminist influences on the social work academy in the UK was at a high point. Social work's turn to feminism is not surprising given that:

> 'Social work is, and always has been, a women's profession. Since its early days in the industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century, women have been at the heart of the social work enterprise, providing services, teaching on educational programmes and receiving services, whether as clients themselves or as carers of service users' (Philips and Cree, 2014:930).

Social Work as a result of its strong connections with women has had 'variable status' as it strived for professional acceptance (Dominelli, 1996: 155). This is not to say that men are and should be excluded from social work. Many men work in the profession, and indeed are more prominent in management roles than frontline work (Galley and Parrish, 2014), and Mallinger et al., (2017) report that in the United States, female social workers have consistently been shown to earn less than their male counterparts. Rather, this acknowledges how strong women's connections are to the profession. It was reported by the Health and Care Professions Council (2017b) almost 82% of qualified social workers in England were female. Les (2017) puts the figure for female child and family social workers in the United Kingdom at 86%. Further, Skills for Care (2018) reported that 82% of workers in adult social care in England were female. Given this situation, it could be said to be no surprise that a number of authors acknowledge the influence of feminism on social work theory and practice (Fawcett, 1998; Dominelli, 2002a, 2002b; Wahab et al., 2015; Wendt and Moulding, 2016). Indeed, Hanmer and Statham (1988) wrote their book 'Women and Social Work' to encourage the emergence of non-sexist woman centred practice in social work. Such a practice they claimed would build confidence and

reduce isolation for women as service users and as social workers. Krane (1991) acknowledged the ways that feminism as a critical perspective could sensitise student social workers to the structural forces shaping the discipline's theory, research and practice. Mary McNay considers social work to owe a debt to feminism as:

> '… the most significant work in integrating the structural and the individual levels of analysis, the personal and the political, or the private and the public, has been carried out by feminists' (M. McNay 1992: 51).

Informed by feminist perspectives, the sexist assumptions at the heart of state welfare policy are critiqued when social workers engage with feminism (Wilson, 1977, 1980; Dale and Foster, 1986; Dore, 1994; Dominelli, 2002a; Epstein et al., 2018). Fawcett (1998) also identified and discussed the influence of feminist perspectives in supporting social work to develop the necessary critical appraisal and action. Modern feminism as a political project influenced the establishment of '*Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work'* in 1986. It was created as a space for feminist women's voices that were underrepresented in mainstream social work journals, its mission as it continues today is to give voice to the myriad ways in which the work of feminists manifests itself in social work (Sage Publishing, 2019).

Recently, Epstein et al., (2018) claimed social work's core business is centred on gender equity, arguing women's diverse experiences can be unearthed by critical feminist social workers, and used as a core knowledge base for the profession. A feminist perspective in social work requires and enables recognition of macro-structural inequalities as the following definition of feminist social work illustrates:

> ' I define feminist social work as a form of social work practice that takes women's experiences of the world as the starting point of its analysis and by focussing on the links between a woman's position in society and her individual predicament, responds to her specific needs, creates egalitarian relations in 'client'- worker interactions and addresses structural inequalities' (Dominelli, 2002a: 7).

I find resonance in this claim as I reflect on my work as a support worker in statutory mental health services from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. At this point my feminist identity was well established, I was guided by it as I worked with women and men to support them as they dealt with the challenges of living with a mental health label. Believing that women's oppression was evident in all aspects of society and impinged on every aspect of a woman's life, I tried to ensure my practice with women enacted the principles outlined in the definition given above. My work with men was also guided by my feminist values, especially my commitment to supporting empowerment. To twenty-first century eyes this may be seen as well intentioned, but an over-simplification. I emphasised structure over agency, as at this time agency did not have the focus it has today. Discussions about agency peaked as poststructural perspectives developed and influenced feminism from the 1980s onwards (Clegg, 2006). Agency in the sense that one has power and influence, and can produce or create a particular effect, has been a source of struggle for feminist theory. Modern feminism with its emphasis on how structural oppressions restrict lives would suggest agency is limited, yet as L. McNay (1992) asserted, adopting Michel Foucault's concepts of power enables acknowledgment of agency through the interplay of discursive systems that construct femininity in certain ways, and in so doing shape women's experiences and embodied experiences. In this model, agency is possible; it is viewed as a discursive effect (Davis, 2007). Butler (1990) developed this theme to suggest gender is "performed". These debates combined with other areas of discussion and tensions meant that the 1990s saw major changes in the development and characterisation of feminism. The optimism of the previous three decades gave way to fragmentation. In the next section, I will discuss some of the arguments, developments and events that shaped feminism as it moved into what David (2016) calls an era of diversity and globalising feminism.

1.9 Feminism in the 1990s

By the 1990s feminism had undergone an enormous transformation in terms of both its epistemological and ontological position. It was a time when there was '… considerable pessimism about feminism' (McNeil, 1993: 164). Its original

goals, and central arguments were challenged from both inside and outside the movement. In addition, some of the most influential feminists such as Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer who had many followers in the 1960s to the 1980s seemed to contradict or retract their earlier positions on women's experiences in the domestic sphere (Friedan, 1981; Greer, 1985).

The feminism of the previous three decades was characterised by 'overt resistance to conventional definitions of what 'being a woman' means' (Whelehan, 1995: 5), and 'the idea of a shared oppression that unites women in their struggle for liberation' (Charles, 1996: 2). These two positions increasingly created tension, as resisting narrow reductionist definitions of "woman" on one hand, is contradicted by the tendency for feminists to then talk as 'we' and espouse that a common experience of women exists. Feminists in the 1960s to the 1980s wanted to liberate women from their subservient status, a status ascribed, involuntary and institutionalised in society. They believed they could do this by positing a view that argued women are oppressed by men. This belief in a shared experience made it possible to use 'we' when discussing women (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Using 'we' and purporting notions of sisterhood became problematic as feminism evolved in the 1990s. Use of 'we' was criticised as essentialist and eliding of differences between women.

Universalising the category woman was also labelled essentialist and construed as '…invoking naturalist explanations or those that necessarily involve fixity and some version of reductionism' (Woodward and Woodward, 2009: 143 &144). This charge of essentialism was problematic for feminism, it 'plagued second wave feminism' (Prokhovnik, 1999:110), as a key area of theorising was around denying the innateness of sexual difference and challenging the view that biology determines differences between women and men. The preferred stance was to argue that social and historical relations of power created the differences between women and men (Whelehan, 1995). The work of de Beauvoir (1953) was drawn upon to reject biological determinism and argue that gender differences were a social construction; women are made and not born. In studying women and sexual difference social constructionists give attention to the social, cultural and historical situations that produce the differences (Kolmar and

Bartkowski, 2005). However, although a social constructionist view challenged ideas about the essential nature of women and men, essentialism was still evident in feminist arguments, as binary opposites were relied upon. The category of "woman" was invoked, and as the basis of feminist activism is femaleness or woman, then this implies an essence that is fixed which all women have or share.

Modern feminism had created a multifaceted, pluralistic space for many types of feminists, and a range of types of feminist began to be recognised. Gray and Boddy (2010) offered the following list as some forms of 'Second Wave Feminism': Radical, Socialist (Marxist) Liberal, Cultural, Social Welfare, Black, Lesbian, Postcolonial, and Postmodern. Ironically, modern feminism's starting point of women organising in the belief that they shared situations and experiences, shifted, '… as they learnt to speak about it, they fast discovered their differences from one another' (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986: 3). This created some discomfort and also meant that examining differences between women and men now gave way to exploring differences between women (Spelman, 1990). In doing so, feminism became increasingly introspective (Sargisson, 1996). As differences were increasing acknowledged, feminists themselves critiqued the feminism of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s for treating women as a homogenous group, '…without paying attention to the many axes of difference that cleave apart the singular category of "women"'(Munro, 2013:23).

An outcome of this was that in the 1990s, feminism's use of the category of woman came under much scrutiny. By giving too much emphasis to the need to speak as, and for women, feminism created an essentialist, classist, and racist theory, confusing '…the condition of one group with the condition of all' (Spelman, 1990:4). The group that were said to have done this were white, middle class, and Western women. Fragmentation within feminism resulted as what has been termed identity politics emerged (Charles, 1996). According to McCann and Kim (2013), identity politics are premised on the belief that those that experience oppressions in specific configurations are in the best position to understand and develop strategies to change such oppressions. Thus, you can be more effective at ending oppression if it is part of your own identity than if you

are doing it on behalf of someone else. Identity has been defined as '…an active construction and a discursively mediated political interpretation of one's history' (de Lauretis, 2007:193). As a result of such a focus, feminists organised groups along the lines of different identities. In some cases, these identities, and allegiances to one or more perspectives emphasised differences between women. The gulf between feminists grew, and some differences were hard to reconcile. There were differences and counter discourses, which for some resulted in '… a sort of sclerosis of the movement, segments of which have become separated from and hardened against each other' (Delmar, 1986: 9). A number of key Black feminists offered important contributions as women's movements started to examine their own exclusionary and ethnocentric tendencies (Charles, 1996; Mann and Huffman, 2005; Woodward and Woodward, 2009; McCann and Kim, 2013). The work of these women will be explored in the next section. These contributions are important to this thesis, as many of the participants in the study were Black women. It is vital therefore to engage with the challenges from Black women.

1.10 Black Feminists' Challenges to White, Middle Class, Academic, and Heterosexual Feminism.

The work of Black feminists resulted in a significant shift in feminist thinking in the 1980s and 1990s. They were '… the first to provide an extensive critique of second wave feminism from within the feminist movement' (Mann and Huffman, 2005:59). The emphasis given to sisterhood and solidarity in Western feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s was criticised for wrongly assuming a shared identity amongst all women. The assumption of a common ground or common identity between women was, according to Delmar (1986) a superficial conclusion, based on description rather than analysis. Audre Lorde captures the core argument here:

> 'By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of

> experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist' (Lorde, [1984] 2000: 289).

This notion of a hegemonic feminism, privileging white, middle class and heterosexual women resonated with many women who identified as feminist but not with these other categories. 'Second Wave Feminism' was therefore critiqued for its emphasis, and for ignoring heterogeneous female identities (Harding et al., 2012). This '… was a critical intervention, one which led to a profound revolution in feminist thought' (hooks, 1994:63). It seemed that feminism's central ideas were undermined, if women have different identities, different experiences of subordination and in some cases are oppressors of other women this has serious consequences for the epistemological and political basis of feminism. Of course, this racial divide was not new, as Brewer and Dundes (2018) note, such division was evident in the earlier suffrage movements in United States. These arguments contributed to the fragmentation of feminism as some women started to challenge what they saw as the homogenising tendencies of white middle class feminism:

> '… since the chief proponents of early second wave politics were white, middle-class, educated women, there was always a grave risk that female identity would become as homogenized as it is in male discourse, and that countless women would be marginalized by a movement which claimed to champion their rights' (Whelehan, 1995:19).

The feminism of the 'chief proponents' described above is that reflected in one of the 'Second Wave's' major texts, Betty Friedan's book *'The Feminine Mystique'* (Friedan, [1963] 2001). The arguments made by Friedan reflected the concerns of white middle class American women, who despite having the opportunities of education and careers, still found themselves lonely, unhappy, and confined in the domestic sphere. The women Friedan wrote about were experiencing 'the problem that has no name' (Friedan, [1963] 2001: 267). This concept of a woman was not one that many Black women could share. Consequently, many Black feminists, particularly in the United States, challenged what they saw as a monolithic view of women, offered by white feminists, whose accounts became

'the official stories' (Sandoval, 1991:7). Other critics of Friedan argued she seemed to take a woman-blaming stance (Whelehan, 1995), and she was charged with representing a heterosexist feminism (Kitch, 2000). However, others acknowledged that her work influenced many women to engage with feminism (Evans, 1995), and as David (2016: 29 and 30) put it, '… *The Feminine Mystique …* arguably launched the feminist movement in the US initially, and later in Europe and beyond.' Friedan's work also continued the project started by earlier feminists, who worked to reduce women's public silence (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005).

Denial of voice became a concern that Black feminists wanted to be addressed, it was important for feminism to recognise that:

> 'Black Feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women and addressing those issues does not make us any less Black.' (Lorde, [1984] 2007: 60).

The Combahee River Collective produced the 'Black Feminist Statement' in 1977 (Whelehan, 1995:107). They took their name in acknowledgment of Harriet Tubman's 1863 raid on the Combahee River, which freed 750 enslaved people (Taylor, 2019). The statement identified how Black women felt solidarity with progressive Black men, but fought multiple and interlocking oppressions, and did not have a racial, sexual, heterosexual or class privilege to rely upon (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005; Taylor, 2019). Racism in the white women's' movement was identified as a major concern too (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005; Taylor, 2019). This statement provided a blueprint for Black feminism that has relevance in the twenty first century, as it provided an expansive definition of feminism to include women of many and varied dispositions and locations (Thompson, 2002). This statement was one of a number of publications that reflect how multiracial feminism flourished from the mid-1970s to the 1990s (Thompson, 2002).

bell hooks a key critic and contributor to these debates, argued that early 'Second Wave Feminism' '…was not a location that welcomed the radical struggle of black

women to theorize our subjectivity' (hooks, 1994: 53). bell hooks' writing has made an enormous contribution to arguments advancing the view that the struggles of Black women are part of wider social justice struggles for humanity, dignity and empowerment. She has examined the complex relations between different forms of oppression arguing that feminism needed to look at its racist biases (hooks, 1981). As a Black American woman, she writes of the effects of slavery and discusses '… the bitterness black slave women felt towards white women' (hooks, 1994:96). She discusses too how white women feminists supported a closed shop view, as they were not interested in her concerns about race. They also recreated the servant- served paradigm in their scholarship, as they appropriated Black women's concerns without fully understanding them. The response to this by Black women has sometimes been to disengage with feminism (hooks, 1994). Fortunately bell hooks has not done this herself, as she does not consider this the answer, instead she has worked to help forge a more inclusive feminist theory (hooks, 2000a). She argues that it is possible for white women who accept the truth of racist oppression to forge better relationships with Black women (hooks, 1994). She has also argued that solidarity can be possible across differences:

> 'Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression' (hooks, 1984:65).

Sisterhood, hooks claims, is still powerful (hooks, 2000a). bell hooks' work has a crucial place in this thesis, not least because I am inspired every time I read her work discussing pedagogy, but also because some of her work provided stimulus material for discussion in the feminist classroom established with participants in this study. I discuss this more in chapter 3.

Patricia Hill Collins is another US Black feminist who has offered a significant contribution to feminism. Arguing in favour of a standpoint theory, Collins articulated her reasons for advocating a Black feminist standpoint (Collins, 2000). She argued that Black women as a subordinated group have a unique insight into the power that subordinates them. This view she claims can lead to valuable

knowledge; the subjugated knowledge of Black women reflects a matrix of domination. However, in recognition that it is reverse positivism to posit that a subjugated group has a clearer view than a dominant group, she concludes that everybody has a partial view. For Collins:

> '… a black feminist standpoint is constituted in and through the politics and continuous interplay between subjugation and agency, thought an activism' (McCann and Kim, 2013: 346).

As I worked with Black women in the feminist classroom, I engaged with ideas such as these. The racial tensions in feminism continue to be evident today; Brewer and Dundes (2018) alert us to the significant differences evident in the differing social locations of participants in the US Women's March in January 2017. Their research interviewed 20 young African American women who had participated in the protest. These women identified how the existence of white privilege meant some of the protesters were focussed on their own concerns, with wider social injustices being ignored, and 'interviewees believed that a racially inclusive feminist movement would remain elusive without a greater commitment to intersectional feminism' (Brewer and Dundes, 2018: 49). I feel keenly these differences, and through my own reflective journal as I progressed this work, I regularly reflected on my own privileges in relation to participants. I share some of this in later chapters. Critiques of Western feminism have also contributed to the call for more intersectional perspectives in feminism, as this next section will explain.

1.11 Challenges to Western Feminism

In 1984 Chandra Talpade Mohanty wrote *Under Western Eyes*: *Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*. This article was extremely influential and challenged Western hegemonic feminism from a perspective of transnational feminism. Mohanty examined how Western feminist texts used colonial discourses as they produced '…the "Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject…' (Mohanty, 1984:333). Drawing on the work of postmodernists such as Foucault and Derrida, Mohanty concluded that there is a

similarity between the ethnocentrism of hegemonic humanist discourse and that of Western feminist writing in how an 'authorizing signature' (Mohanty, 1984:352) legitimises the West while colonising and othering the East. However, it is important to note that at a later date, Mohanty rejected the view that her work should be read as a postmodernist critique of the discourse of Western feminism. She argued that the relativism and contingency of postmodern theories are limited in terms of their usefulness for understanding power in global capitalism (Mohanty, 2003, 2013).

Other challenges to Western feminism came from transnational women and women calling themselves 'Third World Feminists' albeit recognising this term is problematic (Narayan, 1997). Both of these strands emerged to create opposition to:

> 'mainstream second–wave feminism, which subscribed to the idea that all women everywhere face exactly the same oppression merely by virtue of their sex/gender' (Herr, 2014:1).

Many of these women criticised how Western writers failed to acknowledge their complex struggles and resistance and attempted to impose and export a Western feminist agenda. In a similar vein to Patricia Hill Collins, some 'Third World Feminists' have argued that knowledge created from marginal positions confers epistemological privilege that enhances one's ability to understand how oppression and domination operate in Western patriarchal thought (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005). Such arguments supported attempts to forge a global feminism and contributed to a brand of feminism called Postcolonial feminism, which '… seeks a space and discourse in which the knowledge, activism, and subjectivity of Third World women can be articulated' (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005:60).

The charge of essentialism is also levelled at this 'Third World' standpoint feminism, and to go some way to address this, Spivak's (1988) concept of strategic essentialism is often employed here. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who conducts much work in postcolonial feminist theory, wrote of a strategic

essentialism, which would enable invoking a collective category such as the subaltern or women, whilst simultaneously criticising the theoretical unviability of the category invoked. Narayan (1997) also advocated acceding to essentialism as a helpful strategy at certain times, as did Irigaray with her concept of selective essentialism, as a means to foster collective action and shared identification (Howie, 2007). Strategic essentialism can provide possibilities for collective action that the unpacking of the word "woman" and problems with the use of "we" undermine (Woodward and Woodward, 2009). Subsequently, Spivak distanced herself somewhat from what she viewed as misuses of her notion of strategic essentialism (Phillips, 2010), nonetheless her idea that we may have to engage with essence and the risks entailed (Spivak, 1988), as a temporary method in order to achieve political goals is an important theme in feminist theory and politics.

These challenges to Western feminism when faced and explored have supported feminism to become more relevant to the lives of many different women. Feminism has shown itself as able to respond and adapt, to reiterate Bhasin (2014) from earlier on in this chapter, it takes its shape from its surroundings. Of course, in doing so, feminism also has to be mindful of being too flexible, which could make it nebulous and amorphous, continuity is an important condition of feminism too (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015).

Further to some of the serious criticisms of modern feminism, it is important to note that although such critiques of 'Second Wave Feminism' were necessary, not all feminists in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were unaware of other struggles and identities. Adrienne Rich for example could not be accused of ignoring race or sexuality in her work (Rich, 1979). Mann and Huffman (2005) point out that despite widespread claims, many feminists of this era knew they had not ignored differences between women, and a concern with a range of injustices was evident in 1960s American feminism, as many women were also involved in civil rights and anti-war movements. Indeed, the slogan "The Personal is Political" began its life in civil rights and New Left activities, and the feminists who adopted it later knew of it as they were part of these movements too (Thompson, 2002). This is further illustration of the need to represent history as a messy,

contradictory narrative. Linear and neat narratives belie the complexities of the feminist struggle (Nicholson, 2010; Molony and Nelson, 2017; Reger, 2017). As Evans and Chamberlain (2015: 398) assert'… the feminist movement has always been heterogeneous with a polymorphic approach.' Even as these debates were on going, feminists such as Sandra Harding supported this as an opportunity to develop feminism rather than disavow it or allow it to fragment:

> '… we should embrace as a fruitful ground of inquiry the fractured identities that modern life creates Black feminist, socialist feminist, women of colour and so on' (Harding, 1986:28).

Notwithstanding Sandra Harding's plea, the belief in the existence of a hegemonic feminism became widespread:

> '…these debates have forced feminism to examine itself, to be more self-conscious, self-aware, and self-critical in developing its analyses and theories, and to attend more consistently to its avowed gaols of equality and inclusion' (Hirschmann, 2004: 318).

Perspectives from Black feminists, feminists of colour and working-class feminists have meant that feminist theorists have rethought power. Foucault's notions of power, which will be examined later in this chapter, and discussed in chapter 7, also influenced feminism's rethinking of power. Reinscribing key theoretical concepts has been very positive for feminism and enabled a much more sophisticated analysis of gender relations. A consequence of this has been a focus on the notion of intersectionality as a means to combat hegemony, hierarchy and exclusivity in feminism (Nash, 2008; Hoskin et al., 2017).

1.12 Intersecting Identities

> '… though all women are women, no woman is only a woman' (Spelman, 1990: 187).

Gender alone does not shape our lives, and race, class, disability, and sexuality are examples of some of the other phenomena that coexist with gender, and mean we are constituted in multiple ways. Many feminist writers acknowledge this, and hooks' 'interlocking systems of domination/oppression' (hooks, 1989:175), Collins' discussion on the 'matrix of domination' (1991: 225), and King's concept of 'multiple jeopardy' (1988:42) all reflect this type of understanding. Audre Lorde wrote in the 1960s and 1970s, about the ways in which the structures of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism can brutalise and devastate (Ahmed, 2017b). Additionally, as Taylor (2019) notes, the Combahee River Collective, set up in 1974, recognised how enmeshed identities are, and how they compound Black women's experiences of oppression.

Kimberle Crenshaw articulated 'intersectionality' as a model or metaphor for conceptualising differences when she wrote about how the lived experiences of marginalised people were multidimensional (Nash, 2008). Working as a lawyer in the U. S. A., Crenshaw identified that antidiscrimination law treated race and gender separately, and in so doing was not serving the needs of Black women who face overlapping discriminations, as it was making them invisible (Adewumni, 2014). Crenshaw (1989: 139 & 161) discussed the 'multiply burdened' and the 'complexities of compoundedness' in relation to Black women's experiences. To remedy this, Crenshaw offered '…a methodology that ultimately will disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244). Many feminist researchers and writers across the spectrum of feminism and from a range of ethnic backgrounds apply an intersectional lens (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Puar, 2011; Cho et al., 2013; Lewis, 2013; MacKinnon, 2013). Additionally, Thornton Dill and Zambrana (2009) describe it as transformational, arguing it can be used as a tool to reveal subjugated knowledge and develop critical theory. Theorists in Feminist Disability Studies offer a good example of this as they work to uncover the intersections of gender and disability (Bernardini, 2015).

Intersectionality therefore has been given an important place in feminist theory, and lauded as an important contribution to feminist scholarship, perhaps because it '… addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within

feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women' (Davis, 2008:70). Brewer and Dundes (2018) assert that it can support a more inclusive feminism. Molony and Nelson (2017) demonstrate the power an intersectional analysis has in changing understandings of the history of feminisms. Its appeal has resulted in a burgeoning field of intersectional studies (Cho et al., 2013). Mattsson (2014) has argued that it can support social workers as a critical tool to challenge oppression and inequality. I too explore this concept in this thesis as a tool to support mutual understanding of multiple subjectivities with students in the feminist classroom. Consequently, I refer to it again in subsequent chapters in this thesis.

The concept is not without critique, Nash (2008:1) exposed some of the tensions evident in intersectionality scholarship including 'the use of black women as quintessential intersectional subjects' its vague elements, issues with definitions in its methodology and its empirical validity. She concluded she does not wish to undermine its usefulness, but rather to encourage examination of its murkiness to develop a more complex means of theorising about identity and oppression. Similarly, Walby et al., (2012) also proposed ways to advance the theory in order to remedy some of the dilemmas limiting its use, including its tendency to concern itself mostly with the gender and ethnicity intersection, thus neglecting to look at class. Their analysis concluded that utilising versions of critical realism and elements of complexity theory would help to develop the theory and enable a more effective use of it. They claimed that the ontological depth offered by both of these theories could support the concept of intersectionality to avoid reductionism.

As a frame of analysis, it coincides with the ideas of post theorists looking to challenge binary oppositions, universalisms, and understand multiple and shifting identities. Thus, it sits well with the other strands of thought that contributed to the 1990s fragmentation of feminism, namely post theories. The impact of post theories on feminism will now be discussed.

1.13 Challenges to Feminism from Post Theories

A second key area of challenge and tension for feminism in the 1990s came from

postmodernism and poststructuralism. Postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques dominated scholarship in the humanities and social sciences in the late 1980s and 1990s (Callinicos, 1989; Parpart and Marchand, 1995). Crises of representation and legitimation ensued as "post" ideas troubled the solidity and certainty of existing knowledge (St Pierre and Pillow, 2000). The distinction between postmodernism and poststructuralism is not always made clear; some writers use the terms interchangeably (Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Fawcett, 1998; Lloyd, 2007, Hekman, 2014). Others insist on maintaining a distinction, stating postmodernism comes primarily from arts-based areas, and poststructuralism is from social sciences, and has understandings of social structures, power and sociolinguistics at its foundation (Epstein and Moreau, 2017). Allan (2010) recognises it can be hard to discern the distinctions in these two terms and offers simply that poststructuralism is the academic branch of postmodernism, with postmodernism being more applicable in relation to wider cultural and philosophical matters.

Initial feminist discussions of this trend to post theories used the term 'postmodernism'. Postmodernism like feminism is diverse, not monolithic, and constituted of positions that are often in opposition to one another (Gamble, 2001; Allan, 2010). Postmodernism has been described as a '… self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement' (Apple 1991: vii). Jean-Francois Lyotard used 'postmodernism' in 1984 to weave together, the philosophical work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, attacking structuralism, the post-industrial society economic theories of Daniel Bell and Alain Touraine, and the attacks on modern art's functionalism and austerity (Parpart and Marchand, 1995). Lyotard (1984) argued that all three shared a disbelief in metanarratives. Lyotard's incredulity towards metanarratives was influenced by his dissatisfaction with classical Marxist claims about how the working class struggle would create revolutionary social change (Callinicos, 1989).

Postmodern perspectives break with modernism's claim to universal theories, and in so doing disrupt traditional boundaries, interrogate hierarchical patterns of

thought, challenge customary values, emphasise heterogeneity, and historically situate the subject (Gamble, 2001). They replace universal truths and fixed and stable identities with '… a vision of reality and subjectivity that is dynamically constituted via discourse' (Allan, 2010:12). They have many points of similarity with feminism but have also been seen to trouble many of feminism's key arguments. For some, these post perspectives were viewed as '…masculine theoretical products' (Brodribb 1992 xxiii), representing '…a very masculine theoretical tradition' (Jackson, 1992:25). In the 1990s postmodernism was not only seen to challenge to feminism; in other fields it also became '…a loaded and politically volatile word' (Ebert, 1991:886). Some saw it as the logical next step of late capitalism (Apple, 1991), which found a foothold after the perceived failure of left-wing politics to create a revolution or effect any real social change (Callinicos, 1989; Eagleton, 1996).

The tension and volatility it spurred, and continues to spur, is reflected in the words of Nancy Hartsock who almost 3 decades ago, warned 'postmodernism represents a dangerous approach for any marginalised group to adopt' (Hartsock, 1990:160). She was very clear about why women in particular, should be wary of what is often referred to as the 'postmodern turn' (Susen, 2015). A target for critique by Hartsock and others was Michel Foucault, who many see as the embodiment of postmodernism and poststructuralism, although he would have eschewed these labels (Howe, 2008).

Michel Foucault's work offered an important contribution in supporting people to reconsider how power operated (Guizzo and de Lima, 2015). He was a polymath whose work crossed medical, social and human sciences. He has written about investigations relevant to psychiatry, language and discourse, sexuality, ethics, economics and law among others. In his book *Discipline and Punish* he argued that against the idea of single centres of power. Preferring to characterise power as dispersed throughout society, present in every human exchange (Foucault, 1977). For Foucault every individual has power, power is not a binary, it is everywhere, and to understand it we need to look at the micro, and individual levels rather than at large scale social structures (Fook, 2002; Allan, 2009). For

Michel Foucault power exists in relations between people, it is not within the individual (St Pierre, 2000). His words below reflect this view:

> 'The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between "partners", individual or collective; it is a way in which some act on others. Which is to say, of course, that there is no such entity as power, with or without a capital letter, global, massive, or diffused; concentrated or distributed. Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures' (Foucault, 1982 in Faubion, 1994: 340).

In such a conceptualisation as that above, there is no privileged "us" against which to define a marginalised "them". This led Hartsock (1990) to argue that his writing was from the position of the dominator, and he was representing the position of a coloniser despite claiming to have sympathy for the subjugated. This view of power offered by Foucault poses a challenge to the premises of most revolutionary movements, Marxism in particular (Callinicos, 1989; Gutting, 2005). It also challenged so-called 'Second Wave Feminism', as Foucault's concept of power was very different to mainstream feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. He defined power as represented through discourses, it was not structural it was discursive, and he later moved towards a position in which he argued all power is productive as it produces knowledge (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Many feminists found in taking this position, as Hartsock notes, he argued 'power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere' (Hartsock, 1990: 170).

Postmodernism is a reaction to the Enlightenment, but for Hartsock and other feminists it has not provided a viable alternative for those who have been subjugated and marginalised. Hartsock's concerns come from a deep concern about how to support marginalised groups towards self-determination and in this endeavour, she sees postmodernism as unhelpful as it '…obviates the possibility of the systematic knowledge that is necessary for social change' (Hekman, 2004:228). Kermode and Brown (1996:380) indict postmodernism as:

> '… a strategy for perpetuating the status quo. Rather than providing the basis for a way of knowing, it ensures that nothing can be known.'

For many people postmodern stances were seen as apolitical, and some responded to this with cynicism and a sense of political despair (Apple, 1991). Some argued it can be an excuse for inaction, as it deconstructs all 'principled positions' creating 'political and ethical paralysis' (Francis, 2000:24). Australian radical feminist Denise Thompson discussed her concerns about postmodernism's apolitical tendencies too:

> 'To abandon the concepts of "agents and interests" is to abandon politics. If there are no 'agents', there are no perpetrators and beneficiaries of relations of domination, and no one whose human agency is blocked by powerful vested interests' (Thompson, 2001:23).

Such abandonment leaves us with the question of 'Where can we go to challenge power?' As answers to such a question become hard to find in postmodernism, many felt political silencing can follow from rejecting structuralism's key ideas (Charles, 1996). Foucault's claims about power can lead to a sense of hopelessness from the perspectives of a structuralism, humanism, and political movements such as feminism, as '…his account makes room only for abstract individuals, not women, men or workers' (Hartsock, 1990:169). It has been seen to close and or reinforce the doors that women and other subjugated groups spent years and decades knocking down, in order to pass through. Foucault's and postmodernism's analyses '…undermines previous feminist understandings of patriarchy as a monolithic power structure' (Bailey, 1993: 119).

Postmodernism presents 'woman' as a falsely totalising category (Herbold, 1995), thus'… 'women' do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do…' (Alcoff, 1988:420), this being the case, then the feminist aim to end women's oppression is seriously undermined. This postmodern desire to deconstruct concerned some who worried that:

> ‘Women are being deconstructed out of existence and “gender” is replacing women as the starting point of feminist analysis. The logical outcome of postmodernism is indeed post feminism’ (Jackson, 1992:31).

The postfeminism predicted here became a reality, and by the 2000s ‘postfeminism’ became a much-used term. A fuller discussion about this period and postfeminism will be offered later in this chapter. I will discuss it in chapter 5 too, as it has relevance to my analysis of the narrative of “Awakenings and Transformations” identified in my data.

Foucault wrote extensively and offered a severe critique of modern society and modernist ideologies. As feminism in its so-called ‘Second Wave’ was housed in modernist ideas, and was a modernist project (Flynn, 2002), Foucault’s alternative perspective was an anathema to some feminists. Consequently, Nancy Hartsock was not alone in expressing concern, mistrust, and alarm about the threat postmodernism posed for feminism and other emancipatory politics. Alcoff (1988), Hutcheon (1989), Bordo (1990), Brodribb (1992), Hirschmann (2004) all responded with strong opposition to postmodern arguments, leading to lively debate within feminism. Additionally, Sandra Lee Bartky identified sexism in Foucault’s work and argued:

> ‘To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed. Hence, even though a liberatory note is sounded in Foucault’s critique of power, his analysis as a whole reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory’ (Bartky, 1990: 448).

The silence and powerlessness referred to above were starting to be addressed in the 1960s to the 1980s, as a result of action by feminists and other liberatory groups, so Foucault’s timing was a problem for some. The following, again from Nancy Hartsock provides some sense of this concern:

> ‘Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be theorized’ (Hartsock, 1990: 64).

Rosi Braidotti made a similar claim about Foucault and postmodernism’s timing:

> ‘The combination of conceptual elements is quite paradoxical: deconstructing, dismissing, or displacing the notion of the rational subject at the very historical moment when women are beginning to have access to the use of discourse, power and pleasure… The truth of the matter is: one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted’ (Braidotti, 1994: 140-141).

Faubion (1994: xvii) claims that Michel Foucault:

> ‘… wanted to generate doubt and discomfort, and help stimulate a wider process of reflection and action leading to more tolerable ways of thinking and acting.’

Judging by some of the responses of feminists, it seems he achieved this. Foucault did not directly challenge feminism, and according to Ramazanoglu (1993), on a personal level he seemed to be sympathetic to women’s interest in changing the relations of power. Nevertheless, as Ramazanoglu also points out, his work has implications for feminist thought and politics, and invites feminists to think differently about how they construct power between the sexes. His work and that of postmodernists encourage us to rethink power relations by looking at language, and discourse’s role in maintaining inequalities (Fook, 2002), such an activity is necessary to advance a feminist agenda too.

Ahmed (1998) presents a helpful route through some of the impasse. Framing her arguments in the ethics of modernity, she suggests that postmodernism

should not be permitted to lead debates, and feminists need to speak back to postmodernism through refusing to position it as a generalisable condition of how things are in the world. She advocates a dialogical relationship between feminism and postmodernism, while keeping a critical distance, and recognising differences do matter.

Chiming with the concerns of Black feminists, postmodernism's deconstruction of the category of woman can help to address the concerns amongst many feminists that they had repeated the exclusivity that they criticised patriarchy for. Foucault provided a complex and layered notion of difference that resonated with some of the calls from Black women and other feminists, to demote the status given to sexual differences as primary (L. McNay, 1992). His analysis of power also provided a means to better understand how the differences Black women have written about in relation to women exercising power over other women can be taken into account (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Fraser and Nicholson (1990:34-35,) advocated the union of feminism and postmodernism in order to achieve this, arguing such a union would replace:

> '… unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation … such inquiry would be the theoretical counterpart of a broader, richer, more complex, and multi-layered feminist solidarity …'

bell hooks was also positive about the opportunities a postmodern perspective can give feminism through supporting new possibilities for constructions of self and assertion of agency. She argued postmodern culture with its decentred subject can be the space where ties are severed, or as an alternative, it can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding (hooks, 1994).

Consequently, many feminists became enthusiastic about Foucault, and postmodernism, appropriated his notions of power, and did not consider there to be a conflict or incompatibility between feminist and postmodern thinking. Many feminists called for feminism and postmodernism to unite in their shared struggle

against modernist episteme. Weedon (1987) encouraged feminists to see the possibilities a poststructuralist approach can offer. McLaren (2002) also asserts that there are many sites where feminism and Foucault can coalesce to produce positive outcomes. Hekman (1990,2004,2007) argues in favour of feminists using Foucault's discourse theory of knowledge as a form of resistance to male hegemonic discourses. St Pierre and Pillow (2000:1) discuss how feminists found possibilities from the 'post' period rather than '…despair, paralysis, nihilism, apoliticism, irresponsibility or immorality…' Indeed, the term 'Foucauldian Feminists' has been used to show the affinities possible between the two (Macleod and Durrheim, 2002). Although I would not call myself a 'Foucauldian Feminist', I have drawn on Foucault's ideas to support my analysis of the narrative of 'Resistance and Defiance' that I discuss in this chapter 7.

Rinehart (1998) argued that postmodernism opens up opportunities for feminism, as it can provide richer and fuller models of thought and action than those possible in modernist narratives. Many have shown that feminism and postmodernism can live harmoniously, and some have argued that feminism has been dubbed postmodernism's political conscience (Hennessy, 1993). Both feminists and postmodernists challenge the Enlightenment model's version of subjectivity, as they stress the need to understand this with reference to social locations. In so doing, feminists have offered a significant contribution to conceptions of subjectivity. That women in different social positions may experience sexism differently does not entail that they have nothing in common, they still suffer from sexism (MacKinnon, 2000).

Others argue for a more strategic use of postmodernism, in order to transform and develop each side of the debate (Burman, 1990). Certainly, many post insights can support a feminist perspective and vice versa. Feminism can be used to give the social critique and political emphasis that has been found to be lacking in post modernism, and postmodernism can help correct some of the essentialising tendencies of feminist criticism (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990). Susan Bordo uses Foucault selectively, but also advises against overreliance on postmodern ideas as they can lead to the disregarding of material power relations (Bordo, 1993). Using postmodernism selectively was also favoured by Michele

Barrett who offered, ‘One does not have to be a Foucauldian to accept many of his points of critique of Marxism’ (Barrett, 1991: 167). Benhabib (1992) argued for accepting a weak version of postmodernism recognising total acceptance of it is damaging to feminism. Nyman (2014) too argued for a weak version claiming a fully postmodern position is incompatible with the social criticism that is central to feminism’s objectives.

Patricia Hill Collins approaches postmodernism with caution. She recognises that it can be used to support a powerful critique of existing knowledge, hierarchical relations and discourses of modernity that serve to sustain Black women’s oppression; but she also argues it fails to provide clear direction for constructing alternatives (Collins, 2000). Collins is an advocate of standpoint theories (Collins, 2004), which in some readings of a postmodern perspective are unviable. Such theories also advanced by Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith and Donna Haraway (Harding, 2004); argue that if you look at the world from a woman’s perspective or a Black woman’s perspective, your view of it will be very different to traditional and conventional worldviews. Standpoint theorists’ claims about a feminist epistemology, and that it is possible to understand and represent the world from the socially situated perspective of being a woman, are undermined by postmodernism’s concerns about the essentialism evident and inherent in such a view. Nevertheless, for some standpoint perspectives offer viable and necessary contributions to feminist theory, practice, praxis, and activism. I will discuss these perspectives in more detail in chapter 3.

Poststructural theories in asking us not to take categories for granted have proved to be useful for feminist theorists of colour worldwide (McCann and Kim, 2013). These theories have come to dominate much of academic feminism in many Western nations (St Pierre, 2000; St Pierre and Pillow, 2000; Allan et al., 2010; Light et al., 2015; Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017). Postmodernist and poststructuralist criticisms have been useful in supporting feminism to develop and extend its discourse. Morley and Macfarlane (2012) contend that critical engagement with postmodernism can support how social work constructs social problems and enhance the application of feminist values to practice with service users. This claim is relevant in this research context, and as I have engaged with

postmodern and poststructuralist debates, I have witnessed a shifting in my feminist position.

The initial tension that the juxtaposition of feminism and poststructuralism created abated (St Pierre and Pillow, 2000), however, some tension persisted, and poststructural theories should be used with caution according to Woodward and Woodward (2009), who argued poststructuralists' suggestion to dismantle the category woman might not always be instructive. These authors claim:

> 'Women do not share experience in any kind of essentialist way but nonetheless experience is gendered. Women's knowledge has been subordinated to men's in ways which render the category woman a meaningful position from which to speak and to effect change' (Woodward and Woodward, 2009: 171).

The challenges presented by post theories to mainstream feminism were significant and extensive; they contributed to splitting the feminist project. Social work was not immune to the effect of postmodernism; 'fragmented service provision through specialization and contracting out' (Dominelli, 1996: 157) was one effect. The profession also had divisive debates about the contribution postmodernism could make (Morley and Macfarlane, 2012). Feminist social work suffered somewhat, as Cree and Dean (2015) note that social work curriculum's interest in feminism dwindled as the 1990s progressed. Adding to the criticism, Featherstone (2001: online) argued that the ways in which feminist social work in the United Kingdom had so far developed were not desirable or viable. She critiqued how they 'constructed men almost exclusively as problems…' showed a '…tendency towards binary thinking …' and pursued untenable '…dichotomised approaches which sustain fantasies about powerful men and powerless women…'

Such attacks took their toll and it was claimed that by the mid to late 1990s 'Second Wave Feminism' retreated to academic institutions, while activities outside of this became stale and eventually waned (Whelehan, 1995). Griffin (1995) offered an alternative to this view, arguing that many feminist projects

remained active, and new ones emerged in the 1990s. This is perhaps a further example of contrasting representations of feminism's life course and progress.

I retreated to academic institutions at this time. I became a Psychology teacher in 1992. In an academic environment my feminism was accepted without too much hostility. I felt a sense of marginalisation, but in terms of my students, on many occasions with women returning to education, I was heartened to witness students encounter feminism for the first time and find it could support them to validate their experiences. However, younger A level students were not so enthusiastic about it. I found this disheartening especially as my A Level experience had introduced me to the feminism that liberated me. Perhaps they were responding to the state of feminism in the late 1990s, where its vibrancy was lost, certainly outside of academic circles. The challenges for feminism as the twenty first century approached will be discussed in the next section where I will look in more detail at the debates and key strands that developed as what Mann and Huffman (2005) describe as third wave feminism rising and decentring second wave feminism.

1.14 Feminism in the 2000s

As we moved into the twenty first century the feminism that helped shape me was lambasted by the media and characterised as relentless man bashing. Negative media portrayals of feminism were not new, suffragettes had been depicted as unnatural, ungrateful, depraved, ugly, and selfish, (Manchester Central Library, 2018). In the 1960s and 1970s many feminists in Britain and the United States argued they were maligned and misrepresented by journalists portraying them as out of touch man-hating radicals (Bronstein, 2005; Mendes. 2011). Scharff (2012) notes the media has a long history of presenting the stereotype of unfeminine feminists.

In the 2000s a new type of feminist joined in with some of these media attacks, and media used their criticisms to embolden their own assaults on feminism. 'Third Wave' was used to describe the activities of young women who at this time engaged in feminist politics. This activity was presented by its proponents as

distinct from earlier movements, especially those of the 1970s and 1980s (Mahoney, 2016). Consequently, these young feminists:

> ‘Rejected some of the tropes of the Second Wave, embracing high heels and make-up that the Second Wave had rejected and claiming that it was possible to be beautiful and have a brain. ‘Girl Power’ was born, subverting language such as Slut and Bitch’ (van der Gaag, 2017:30)

This new brand of feminism reflected postmodern ideas as they challenged essentialism in ‘Second Wave’ activities and worked to include women who previously had felt excluded such as Black, lesbian, disabled and working class women (Cree and Dean, 2015). It is characterised as ‘humorous, non-mainstream, accessible, empowering, dynamic, hip and happening, and indefinable’ (Bromley, 2012:145). Some of this ‘Third Wave’ feminism set up generational tensions, as there was a tendency to take for granted the victories won by earlier feminists by setting themselves in radical opposition (Woodward and Woodward, 2009). For some there was even a reluctance to use the words feminist or feminism, as the following from an early proponent of this ‘new wave’ shows:

> ‘Young women coming of age today wrestle with the term [feminist] because we have a very different vantage point on the world than that of our foremothers … for many it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn’t allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories’ (Walker, 1995 xxxii-xxxiii).

‘Third Wave’ feminism offered to apply correctives to ‘Second Wave’ limitations, whilst reflecting an increasingly complex social, economic, political, technological and cultural landscape (Budgeon, 2001; Budgeon, 2011). Hesse-Biber (2012) argues these changes in direction provide convincing support for claims that feminist thinkers are willing to retool and rethink their practices and assumptions, in order to give power and authority to feminist theory.

However, as Bronstein (2005) points out, this feminism is heterogeneous and defined through and against the 'Second Wave', although media representations of it tend to ignore this complexity. The generational tensions have often been given undue attention in discussions about the 'Third Wave', overlooking some of its more positive elements (Mahoney, 2016). Mahoney also argues that the 'Third Wave' is a more inclusive, and improved feminism because it permits an intersectional analysis. For some, this focus means it makes contributions towards the validation of Black female success and education (Bryant, 2017). Indeed, 'Third Wave' was used initially by feminists supporting an anti-racist agenda (Gillis et al., 2007; Mahoney, 2016).

Positivity about this new brand of feminism aside, what was also shaping feminism in the 2000s was a global neoliberal feminist discourse. Burman (2012) discussed how the increased feminisation of our culture, which celebrates supposedly feminine qualities such as relationality and intuition, is a product of neoliberal governmentality, and therefore something we should worry about. Keller (2011) too noted that the ethos of Western 'Third Wave' feminism with its primary focus on a celebration of individual agency results in a neglect of wider and larger examinations of structural barriers and relations of power. A more individualistic emphasis resulted in the idea of postfeminism emerging in Western countries in the late 1980s, but under this new guise of feminism, gendered assumptions prevailed (Lazar, 2014). It is closely aligned to neoliberal perspectives, as both focus on individualism, and the self-regulating and self-transforming subject (Gill and Scharff, 2011).

Some used the concept of postfeminism to represent feminism's move towards poststructuralism, or as another name for 'Third Wave' feminism, as well as part of a backlash to feminism (Ringrose, 2013; Gill et al., 2017). This backlash was complex and emerged in the 2000s as people started to think differently about feminism, the visibility of women, and blame social problems on feminism's success, believing it had led to a crisis in masculinity (McRobbie, 2013).

I felt this backlash keenly as I worked in further education colleges in the 2000s. I was a teacher educator by this point and my role was to support college

teachers from a range of vocational and academic disciplines to achieve a professional qualification in teaching. I had responsibility for a unit called 'Inclusive Learning in Post Compulsory Education' and decided to tailor my delivery of this to incorporate feminist perspectives. Whilst many of the students responded well, a significant number each year were challenged by my approach. Some of the resistance was what I perceived as old-fashioned sexism, others resisted because they believed the dual forces of post theories and achievements already won, had undone feminism. The students expressed that postfeminism was the state of affairs, and my attempts to tell them about feminism was giving them a history lesson that was not going to support them to be better teachers. I offer a fuller discussion on postfeminism in chapter 5 as it has relevance to my discussion of the 'Awakenings and Transformations' narrative present in my data.

Nevertheless, despite this, the goals for this project emerged at this time. It was at this time that I began to think seriously about a PhD. Initially I was bruised by poststructuralism's and postfeminism's dominance and felt they signified that any engagement with feminism reflected I was a naïve at best, oppressive at worst. My desire to understand and interrogate experiences of structural oppressions was redundant in my reading of post theories. I therefore shaped my focus on the concept of marginalisation. I wanted a project that supported understanding of inequalities and addressed concerns about oppression and discrimination, so I turned to disability studies as an area in which to work. My heart was not in this as I felt frustrated not to be giving feminism a central place, and after some time I abandoned this project.

In 2013 with the security of a full time and permanent role as a senior lecturer in a higher education setting, I had the confidence to pursue my preferred route for my PhD studies and this project started to take shape. I was also emboldened by the fact that from the ruins of feminism's substantial and substantive challenges, others were suggesting engaging with feminism can still be a good thing. Woodward and Woodward (2009) and Bromley (2012) argued it still mattered, den Boer (2015) asserted it was still needed, and Evans (2015) claimed that the gains of the 1960s and 1970s combined with a need to respond to neoliberal and

neoconservative attacks meant feminism has resurged, and activism was thriving in the United States and Britain. In addition, Adiche, (2014, 2017) encouraged African women to engage with feminism, David (2016) put the case for reclaiming it and van der Gaag (2017) demonstrated how the world still needs it. The following from Hekman also resonated:

> 'Hartsock was right: postmodernism, although immensely valuable to feminism in many ways, led us down a path of endless (rather than principled) relativism, instead of deconstructing the discourse/reality dichotomy, postmoderns led us to focus exclusively on discourse to the exclusion of reality. Today's material feminists are concerned to redress this balance. They want to bring the material back in without losing the insights of discursive analysis' (Hekman, 2014:15)

A 'Fourth Wave' of feminism has also been suggested as a way to characterise the feminists who use the Internet to create a global community of feminists (Munro, 2013). This is still nascent (Chamberlain, 2017), and faces many of the challenges earlier feminists have faced, but it is putting feminism back on the agenda (Cochrane, 2014; Phillips and Cree, 2014; Evans, 2015; Cree and Dean, 2015; Chamberlain, 2017). This type of feminism is less antagonistic towards 1970s and 1980s feminist activities than the 'Third Wavers' as it tries to build bonds between women and men with different perspectives and experiences (Cochrane, 2014). As mentioned earlier, the recent MeToo campaign has also contributed to increasing recognition for the need for feminism, giving me heart to pursue my project.

1.15 Chapter Conclusion

In this first chapter of the thesis I have offered a detailed discussion of how my feminist positionings have evolved. I have made feminism central to this thesis and in this chapter, I have explored how this has been a messy, tangled and troubling experience. Feminists are concerned with understanding and interrogating gender relations, yet are informed by different theoretical underpinnings, making a neat definition of feminism and feminist impossible

(Allan, 2010; Phillips and Cree, 2014). However, after Whelehan (1995) I would say that its resistance to easy categorisation is part of its radicalism.

Hoskin et al., (2017a) note Western feminism has a complex and heterogeneous history that is regularly fractured. This chapter outlines some of this history and shows how Western feminism is diverse and paradoxical, with a range of positions, even contradictory and opposing positions sitting under its umbrella. Perhaps in some way this inclusivity has contributed to some of its problems, but this should be a reason for celebration rather than regret. In line with Newman (2013) I see no value in blaming feminism for its own undoing as this contributes to its demonisation. In addition, there has to be a balance between romanticising on the one hand and depreciating historical accounts of feminism and women's struggles for equality on the other. I hope my chapter has been able to strike some of that necessary balance.

I consider my links to feminism to be extensive, and in this chapter, I have threaded in my experiences as I situate myself in the story of how Western feminism has developed. This supports me toward the fourth aim of my research – to contribute to feminist theory and narrative by sharing my story. This is inevitably a partial story, a product of my own particular locations (Rich, 1984; Haraway, 1988; Collins, 1991,2000; Mackinlay, 2016). I am not claiming to have provided a definitive account here, as feminism is a rich and complex story. In addition, I write myself in as the researcher in order to reflect on the significance of my various positions for the research I report in this thesis (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010).

Engaging in this process of reflection and reflexivity has supported me to recognise the plurality of feminism and discouraged me from making a claim to be a particular type of feminist. I will therefore take the label feminist but not go beyond this to add any more signifiers to my approach. I do this whilst recognising 'it has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective' (Haraway, 1985: 72). Perhaps in a contradictory way, resisting having a label applied to me (apart from the feminist one) I am reflecting 'Third Wave' tendencies**.** In common with many authors cited in this chapter, I appreciate that

there is no unified set of goals that all feminists share. Women's subjectivities are constituted through a number of factors that interplay in varying ways, meaning we cannot be denoted as a homogeneous group. Even within the subgroups there are many differences, feminism takes on many shades (Appignanesi et al., 2013).

I can see value in the different positions various feminists take and have no desire to dismiss other feminists. I find it helpful to think of the progress of feminism not in terms of rejections of ideas but of clarifications. I view myself as owing a debt to both so-called 'First and Second Wave' feminists. As this chapter has outlined, my Manchester connections link me to the suffrage struggle during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I was born during the 1960s, so modern feminist concepts have meaning to me, and I acknowledge how their efforts supported better understanding of many marginalised issues, though I recognise that some practices during this era were exclusionary. I do not wish to minimise the concerns of feminists who have felt excluded and have explored them in this chapter in an effort to demonstrate the importance of criticality in feminism. I advocate using the ideas of some1960s and 1970s feminist activities as discursive categories in order to signify that there are various ways of interpreting them. This seems better than simply ceasing to engage with the ideas.

Doing this may suggest I am a poststructuralist feminist, and as outlined in the chapter, their critique of mainstream 1960s and 1970s feminism was damaging. In addition, my exploration of my subject positions/subjectivities in this chapter may also point to me being poststructuralist in my approach, as Johnston (2010) notes being explicit about one's positions and assumptions is linked to poststructuralist feminist practice. I am however wary of taking a fully poststructural position, reasons for which I have outlined. I prefer a weak version of postmodernism (Benhabib, 1992; Benhabib, 1995; Benhabib et al., 1995; Nyman, 2014) and strategic uses of it (Burman, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Ahmed, 1998; Collins, 2000) rather than wholesale acceptance. This may in part be due to the strong associations I have with Marxism from my A level Sociology, and humanism from my studies in Psychology in the 1980s. Additionally, I find the

critiques of postmodernism offered by Hartsock (1990) and Callinicos (1989) compelling and I am attracted to the standpoint arguments of Harding (2012), and Collins (2000) and other Black and transnational feminists (Huckaby, 2013; Nadar, 2014). I share too Mohanty's (2013) concerns about the depoliticising effects of post arguments. It is important to me that feminism is not dissolved or diluted as it engages with other conceptual approaches such as post arguments, or that this coexistence leads to simplistic and uncritical debates. The influence of these ideas is evident in how I progressed this research study, as later chapters will testify.

My engagement with post arguments is of course made problematic by the different ideas about what the prefix of 'post' represents. In some contexts, 'post' signifies in opposition to, and in others, it reflects a continuation of (Bromley, 2012). McRobbie (2009) argued the 'post' in the context of postfeminism was a part of a backlash against feminism, which served to undermine feminism, and present it as an unpalatable relic of the past. Yet for others, postfeminism is a reflection of feminism's engagement with poststructural, postmodern and postcolonial movements (Gamble, 2001). P. Lewis (2014) considered the prefix to acknowledge rather than reject feminism, and that it reflects the ongoing transformations shaping the movement's progress.I accept the tension between many post theories and feminism has subsided as many feminists find they can combine both to produce exciting and hopeful possibilities. Intersectionality is an outcome of this, and as discussed too in this chapter, offers many opportunities as an evolving theory (Cho et al., 2013; Liu, 2019). Nevertheless, there are still some tensions, (Nyman, 2014), and writers are still moved to find an effective strategy that '…counters the danger of fragmentation inherent in postmodernism and intersectional feminism without giving in to the temptation of essentialism' (Cattien, 2017:5). This tension can be felt keenly in a social work or social care context as well as an educational one, the contexts for this thesis. The trajectory of feminist social work practices also include engagement with, and debate about, the many tensions discussed in this chapter. Here too there has been a move from a position that claims there is a readily accessible feminist identity for social workers to embrace and affiliate to, to a recognition that identities are more splintered and diverse (White, 2006). Such debate has contributed to limiting the

influence of feminism in social work (Cree and Dean, 2015). Without critical perspectives such as feminism, neoliberalism's discourses and their appropriation of many postmodern concepts impact greatly on these contexts. Morley and Macfarlane (2012) make a convincing case for revisiting the feminism/postmodernism nexus and critically engaging with postmodernism in order to enhance critical social work practice. I agree with their claims that concerns about social justice and equity are being marginalised as neoliberal discourses take precedence.

Like Ortner (2014) my concerns are not necessarily with the substance of post arguments but rather the effect, particularly in relation to postfeminism. I have discussed this too in this chapter and offer a fuller examination of it in my later chapter 5. For now, I will say postfeminism's recasting of gender equality in neoliberal terms give an emphasis to individualism that elides the role of structural inequalities in people's lives. It is this that I find most objectionable and most at odds with my work in social care and social work education. Some of 'Third Wave' feminism has contributed to this, but new activism in feminism is reclaiming some of this emphasis. I hope that my work in this project can make a contribution here. Through creating feminist spaces in which to work with students, I hope to achieve the aims of this project. The feminist pedagogical approaches I employed to achieve this will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 - Bringing Feminism into the Classroom

2.1 Chapter Introduction

As a teacher I aim to imbue my teaching practice with feminist perspectives, this is an outcome of my allegiance to feminism, the development of which I have explored in the previous chapter. My commitment to feminism informs and shapes my practice as a teacher, and indeed as a researcher as my subsequent chapter 3 will demonstrate. In my role as a teacher I aspire to embody and enact practices that can be termed 'Feminist Pedagogy', based on my belief that 'the feminist teacher can be a potent agent of change' (Culley, 1985:211). Therefore, in this second chapter of the thesis, I aim to explore the ways in which feminism can influence teaching practice, and how the outcomes of this can create a teaching and learning experience that is distinguishable from many other teaching and learning settings. I recognise the varied and various strands that exist as feminist teachers practice in education, and that feminist teachers vary in accordance with their own emotional and theoretical identifications with feminism (Leathwood, 2004). As a result, feminist pedagogy takes multiple approaches as it works to encourage all students to 'participate in learning that values all humanity…' (Smith–Adcock et al., 2004: 404). I offer my feminist voice here with the caveat that 'there is no one authentic feminist voice from which to speak' (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017:14).

I begin the chapter by exploring what attracts me to this type of pedagogy, this enables an examination of how this pedagogical approach has been characterised and defined by a range of authors. This examination affords a discussion of the possibilities and potentials this approach to teaching and education presents, and here a discussion of the tensions, contradictions and challenges that can be faced as such pedagogy is enacted are also offered. Much of this is similar to the debates in feminism already explored in chapter 1. There is lively debate here too about the tensions entailed in taking feminist positions and translating explanations of gender relations into transformative actions (Holland et al., 1995). Neoliberalism for example, is a key source of challenge, I have made reference to it a number of times in the previous chapter,

now in this chapter I discuss its impact on higher education, and indeed social care/work education, more thoroughly. Indeed, resisting such effects is an aim of this project, as stated earlier in this report. In addition, as I interrogate the literature on feminist pedagogy in this chapter, I thread into my commentary discussions about how this approach to teaching and learning can support education in social work and social care contexts. This is the teaching and learning context in which the thesis is based, and a claim of this thesis is that in this context, feminist pedagogy principles can produce the sort of learning required to meet the social justice mandates of social care/work professions. These mandates, as many authors identify, are at risk in the current neoliberal climate (Rogowski, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; Fenton, 2014, 2016, 2018, Reynaert et al., 2019). Feminist pedagogy with its critical stance in relation to power in particular, can support social work education to more fully engage with social justice and human rights concerns (Epstein et al., 2018). Having offered a full discussion on feminist pedagogy's potential, possibilities and the problems it can face, I then give context to this approach to teaching and learning with an examination of how it developed from its origins in Women's Studies courses. Its history is also entwined with critical pedagogy, so I finish the chapter with an exploration of feminist pedagogy's relationship to other liberatory and critical pedagogies.

2.2 Potentials, Possibilities and Problems in Feminist Pedagogy

A neat and coherent definition of feminist pedagogy is difficult if not impossible (Weiler, 1991). As with feminism (as the previous chapter showed) difficulty with definition results because there is 'not a unitary or static discourse' (Kenway and Modra 1992:159). Despite this, many attempts at a definition have been offered in order to reflect the aims, principles and scope of feminist pedagogy (Coia and Taylor, 2013). Put simply it is the '…infusion of feminist values into the process and methods of teaching' (Forrest and Rosenberg, 1997: 179). Of course, this in itself is a statement that is much more complex than it may at first appear. The possibilities suggested by this statement also come with tensions, conflicts, and contradictions, as this approach tends to '…problematize traditional constructions of the academy' (Leathwood and Hey, 2009:436). These challenges are felt

within the feminist classroom and without, from wider institutional policies, practices, and responses. They can result in what Canadian authors Langan and Morton (2009:398) referred to as a 'chilly climate'. Perhaps this is unsurprising given that:

> 'Feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks a transformation of the academy…' (Shrewsbury, 1997:167).
>
> 'Feminist pedagogy has been developed in opposition to the traditional hierarchical relationship between teacher and taught' (Morley, 1998:16).
>
> 'Academic feminism has challenged the university with regard to everything from institutional practices like admissions to issues of curriculum and pedagogy' (Bondy et al., 2015:3).

As part of this challenge and aim for transformation, many feminists, including myself, work to foster a teaching and learning experience that seeks to achieve goals such as those outlined by Webb et al., (2002). These authors reviewed decades of literature on feminist pedagogy and offered the following six basic principles that combine to create a collaborative learning experience:

1. Reformation of the relationship between teacher and student
2. Empowerment
3. Building community
4. Privileging the individual voice
5. Respecting the diversity of personal experience
6. Challenging traditional pedagogical views

Lawson (2011:109) identified its hallmarks as 'multiplicity of voice, experiential epistemology, and shared power and authority in the classroom.' Lawrence (2016:online) also narrowed her summary to three key aims: 'resisting hierarchy, using experience as a resource, and transformative learning', whilst at the same time advising against reducing feminist pedagogy to a limiting list of characteristics, '…with a canon of authoritative references to follow up.'

There is an extensive literature on this topic, and characterisations of it from this literature have resonances with my ideas about the kind of teacher I aim to be. After hooks (1994), I believe education and teaching should be practices of freedom, and not reinforce domination. One reason I am attracted to feminist pedagogy is because it offers an approach to teaching and learning that enables critical thinking, and creates and supports change (Light, 2015; Bondy et al., 2015; Herman and Kirkup, 2017). Such goals sit well with the teaching situations I have encountered in my career, as I have mostly taught in areas where students' future work opportunities engage them with people who require support. As a teacher educator in the past, I worked to support the development of teachers who can provide inclusive classroom spaces that recognise the varied social locations of their students. In my current role as a Lecturer in Social Care I support students who will work in the care sector to value differences and understand the impact of social inequalities on service users' lives. Approaching my teaching in these contexts from a feminist perspective '…helps lay the foundation for educating civically engaged and critically responsible citizens capable of transforming our world' (Light, 2015: 285).

Making a change in society through one's work in education is an aim of feminist educators (Smith- Adcock, 2004). Morley (1998:15) described feminist teachers as 'feminist change agents', and many other writers recognise that feminist pedagogy has the potential to transform students '…from passive recipients of knowledge to active knowers who see themselves as agents of social change' (Currie, 1992:341). In a similar vein, Nyachae (2016: 791) offers: 'Black feminism in education…informs and empowers Black girls about social structures for the purpose of social change.'

The students I currently teach wish to work in the social care field and share a desire to make changes both at a personal and a wider societal level. This wish can be supported by a feminist perspective, which '…recognizes education both as a site for *struggle* and as a tool for *change making'* (Briskin and Coulter, 1992: 249). This focus on social change is also evident in the goals of social work, as the following global definition of social work reflects:

> ‘Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing’ (IFSW, 2019: online).

This definition recognises that social work is not a value-neutral practice or devoid of power when it comes to addressing injustices and inequalities (Reynaert, et al., 2019).

The links between feminism, feminist pedagogy and social work have already been established as vital to this thesis. As stated earlier, these three strands connect me as the researcher. The data collected for this thesis is in the context of supporting social care and social work students to engage with feminism as a critical discourse, in a feminist classroom setting, in order to support more effective practice with service users as they progress to be professional social workers. The critiques of social structures that feminist perspectives enable and afford can make such a goal achievable (Briskin, 2015). Social work/care teaching contexts offer an excellent opportunity for feminist praxis, ‘…the act of integrating theory with practice in a reflexive manner.’ (Nicholas and Baroud, 2015: 246), or ‘…action and reflection upon the world in order to change it’ (hooks, 1994 :14). Making changes that aim to redress inequalities is central to feminism’s, feminist pedagogy’s, and social work’s goals. Epstein et al., (2018) argue that critical feminist social work pedagogy can shed light on how lived experiences of service users, students, and educators are conditioned by relations of power. Feminist pedagogy’s potential to support students to better understand inequalities is also reflected in the following quote:

> ‘...feminist pedagogy … provides educators with the means to help students integrate emotional responses to social injustices with cognitive learning. Given the current climate, feminist pedagogy is essential to

> promoting critical thinking and reflection that leads to transformative learning, student empowerment and collective action' (Larson, 2005:135).

Bringing feminism into the classroom is a means to build active connections with progressive forces arguing and organising for change (Briskin, 1990), and Louise-Lawrence (2014) offers that approaching teaching as activism is a core principle of feminist pedagogy. This makes it a politicised context because it is 'teaching that engages students in political discussion of gender justice.' (Fisher, 2001:44). In a social care/work context this can include explicit discussion of how injustices operate, not just in regard to gender but in relation to other structural inequalities. Such discussions are necessary in this context in order to meet the prerequisites for attaining a social work qualification. As Fenton (2014) asserts, this means it is necessary to require students to demonstrate openness to changing narrow views they may have. In such a space tension is inevitable, and a sense of struggle is evident and shared in feminist classrooms, (Leach and Moon, 2008). After all, teaching anti-oppression content is both complex and challenging (Garran et al., 2015). Yet, it:

> '…should be a place where there is a sense of struggle, where there is a visible acknowledgement of the union of theory and practice, where we work together as teachers and students to overcome the estrangement and alienation that have become so much the norm in the contemporary university. Most importantly, feminist pedagogy should engage students in a learning process that makes the world "more real than less real"' (hooks, 1989:51).

There are many sources of challenge and tension as we try to engage students and produce this sense of the real. In the feminist classrooms established for this thesis I tried to achieve this by providing opportunities to discuss personal experiences (more detail on this is provided in chapter 3). For social care and social work students such chances are necessary to build the critical perspectives needed for anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive perspectives to become part of their practice. However, integrating the personal experiences of both students and teachers with course content may not always be welcomed. In

trying to follow ideas such as those of bell hooks, above, the feminist teacher is turning accepted ways of teaching on their head, this is not always well received, some students can feel disempowered and uncertain if traditional boundaries are seen to be blurred:

> '…shifting paradigms or sharing knowledge in new ways challenges; it takes time for students to experience that challenge as positive' (hooks, 1994: 42).

> 'The urge to experiment with pedagogical practices may not be welcomed by students who often expect us to teach in the manner they are accustomed to' (hooks, 1994:142).

These differences in perspective can create barriers between students and teachers. This combined with other tensions inherent in feminist pedagogy can as Henderson (2019) notes, be felt more keenly in some circumstances such as guest lecturing. Morley (1998:23) described the role of the feminist teacher as 'complex, contradictory and uncertain'. Feminist classrooms are not necessarily a '…scene of perpetual collaborative bliss' (Schilb, 1985: 256), and 'feminist classrooms can be intense spaces' (do Mar Pereira, 2012:128). It is regularly uncharted territory, a place on unknowns, Coia and Taylor (2013:6) in their self-study presented as co/autoethnography discuss how 'unknowability' and uncertainty were 'deeply embedded' in their practice as feminist teachers. These characterisations contrast with early portrayals of feminist pedagogy, such as the following:

> 'The enthusiasm and energy level of both faculty and student participants are unusually high in Women's Studies, with much emphasis on consciousness - raising, self-actualization and political activism' (Rosenfelt, 1973:1).

This idyll is not always achieved, and anger can be felt in the feminist classroom (Culley, 1985, Currie, 1992, Dorney, 2015). Feminists' challenges to traditional teaching relationships can disarm and unnerve students:

> ‘Feminist pedagogy problematizes the nature of knowledge itself, implying that it is partial, exclusionary and incomplete. It is considered erroneous that knowledge is fixed, certain and the property of teachers, rather it is produced in the process of the interaction of classroom engagement’ (Morley, 1998:16).

Encouraging students to value their own and each other’s knowledge is not always straightforward. In my practice, I have encountered many instances where students desirous for me to give them knowledge felt cheated if there was too much student discussion in the classroom. In such scenarios, tension was evident as I tried to enact one of feminist pedagogy’s aims ‘…to give authenticity to students’ experiences and to welcome their perspectives as a valuable resource for learning’ (Coate Bignell, 1996: 315). Facilitating student participation can be seen as the teacher abdicating their responsibility, and this can be felt more keenly in the market driven economy of education, where students may feel they want value for money (Morley, 1998; Lawson, 2011). The pressures from the neoliberal contexts that many higher education institutions operate in will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Student reluctance to value the feminist classroom with its emphasis on personal knowledge can be based on student acceptance of traditional ideas about what knowledge is, who has it, and how it should be communicated. Linda Markowitz discussed how students may be emotionally connected to the false dichotomies that pervade a positivist epistemology, and that most feminists seek to undermine. Her study sought to discover if feminist pedagogy reduced the likelihood of students using morally dichotomous frameworks as a means to resist engaging in analysis about inequalities, injustices and oppressions. She concluded that feminist pedagogy’s emphasis on the social construction of knowledge can assist students to develop their cognitive/moral frameworks (Markowitz, 2005). Fenton (2014, 2018) has discussed similar concerns in a social work context, and reported how younger students are less critical, more accepting of neoliberal practices, and less open to challenging hegemonic thinking. She concludes such stances are worrying for the social work profession, and its ability to fully support service users as they negotiate

structural oppressions. It is this sort of eventuality that my work in this project hopes to go to some way to avoid.

Of course, it is worth mentioning here that some writers have also troubled the issue of student resistance. Lather (1991b: 134) argues that the teacher's lament that the students are 'not getting it' is based on an assumption that the authority lies with the teacher. Such a claim needs to be considered carefully by the feminist teacher and is another source of tension. Gore (1993) helps to resolve some of this by offering that authority in the feminist classroom is about authority with students rather than over students. This reflects that feminist practice requires critical examination of multiple discourses. Reflection, which is also part of a feminist approach, can be used by feminist teachers to support them to ensure that in their efforts to combat injustices in society, they do not simply replace one authoritarian discourse with another (Crabtree and Sapp, 2003).

Early feminist pedagogies were critiqued by Patai (1994) for example, who identified that mainstream feminist pedagogy marginalised women of colour and advised against assuming that the discourse of feminism protects a teacher from enacting inequalities and exploiting other women in their practice. In addition, Mogadime (2003) stressed the need to ensure oppressive practices are not reproduced if students' contributions do not fit with the notions of feminism held by the teacher. These critiques reflect some of the debates I discussed in chapter 1 in relation to hegemonic feminism and its exclusionary practices.

Work from authors such as these has supported feminist pedagogy to develop its strategies so that 'feminist concepts and theory prepare students holistically to understand oppression and its intersectional nature…' (Seethaler, 2014:39). The fruits of such critiques have enabled feminist pedagogy to develop as a teaching and learning approach, and one key area of critique that has contributed comes from women of colour (Anzaldua, 1981; hooks, 1981, Lorde, [1984] 2007; Mogadime, 2003; Green, 2007). These writers and others have offered perspectives from Black, Latina and Indigenous women, which have supported the development of intersectional analysis in feminist pedagogy:

> ‘Intersectionality requires the use of multiple categories of analysis, including purposeful reflection on how these categories intersect, work in conjunction, or grind against one another uneasily’ (Bondy et al., 2015:3).

As a consequence:

> ‘Feminist pedagogy addresses, race, class, gender and sexuality as crucial categories for analyzing experience and institutions… it also explores the complex and frequently ignored intersections of these categories’ (Mogadime, 2003: 23).

Many feminist teachers engage with intersectionality to facilitate direct work with theories and axes of identity in their classrooms (Lacey and Smits, 2015). I have discussed intersectionality in chapter 1 and return to it again in subsequent chapters. In these later chapters I discuss how the feminist classroom I established with students engaged us in examination of myriad ways in which oppression is enacted, as a consequence, students were able to use this is to develop their understandings of inequalities in their own and others’ lives. This understanding was linked to the narrative of ‘Awakenings and Transformations’ discussed in chapter 5 and the narrative of ‘Resistance and Defiance’ discussed in chapter 6.

Critiques are integral to the development of feminism and feminist pedagogy, they are inbuilt due to the central place given to reflexivity in feminist scholarship, after all ‘…a scholarship that does not critique its own mechanisms cannot be counted as feminist’ (Lawrence, 2016:3). However, it is important to note as part of this critique process, as I did in chapter 1, that although it may be appealing to represent history as linear and homogeneous, doing so can lead to inaccurate perceptions. For example, Carolyn Shrewsbury who is recognised as a pioneer of feminist pedagogy (Raven, 2014), presented feminist pedagogy as intersectional in its early days:

> ‘Feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning- engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being

> studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism, and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge…' (Shrewsbury, 1987:6).

As a result of another key area of critique for feminism, (also discussed in chapter 1), poststructural perspectives' critical examination of all of one's subjectivities have a central place in feminist classrooms, as in such places all participants are reassessing the world and their own lives '… imagining them differently, and attempting to change them' (do Mar Pereira, 2012: 129). The changes hoped for include the creation of a more equal society as 'feminist pedagogies advance social justice by weakening the foundations of sexist, racist, homophobic, classist, and other oppressive ideologies' (De Welde et al., 2013: 105). In social care and social work education, this can have particular relevance. Fairtlough et al., (2014) report that the progress of Black and ethnic minority students on social work courses in England is slower than that for White counter parts. This is something in need of serious examination.

My own experience supports this finding, and another motivation for my research focus for this PhD was work with Black and minority ethnic students on social work programmes who requested my support as they navigated institutional barriers (chapter 3 offers more detail on this). Giving such support is '…often emotionally demanding work,' (do Mar Pereira, 2012:129) as discussions around social justice can lead to feelings of anger (Griffin and Ouellett, 2007). It is therefore important that the teacher can support such emotions. Indeed, many feminist educators encourage anger in recognition that becoming a socially just citizen is not an easy journey (hooks, 1994; De Santis and Serafini, 2015).

This can of course affect comfort levels, and the feminist classroom is not always a harmonious and comfortable place, Weiler (1995) notes the irony inherent when offering an equal space for all student voices raises awareness of inequality that can result in anger. However, feminist pedagogues acknowledge and often embrace this as Maxine Greene wrote:

> '… feminist pedagogies … demand critical examination of what lies below the surface. They demand confrontations with discontinuities, particularities, and the narratives that embody actual life stories' (Greene, 1992: x).

The characterisations of feminist pedagogy discussed so far are not exclusive to feminist classrooms; they are shared by a number of other approaches to teaching, specifically other forms of critical pedagogy. For me, feminist pedagogy is preferred to these other critical approaches because it gives a central role to gender and as my first chapter to this thesis outlined, feminism is central to me and of course this project. The connections between feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogies will be further examined in a later part of this chapter.

Acknowledging the role of gender matters to me because another notable feature of the contexts in which I teach, and have taught, is that the majority of my students are female. For many years, I taught adult returners who were having a second chance at education in order to make positive changes in their lives. This work took place when terms such as 'Lifelong Learning' (DfEE, 1996; DfEE, 1998a; DfEE, 1998b) and 'Widening Participation' (Kennedy, 1997) were buzzwords central to further education policies in the United Kingdom. In the areas, I taught at the time, it was mostly women who responded to these government initiatives and returned to college to improve on school qualifications or achieve qualifications for the first time. Similarly, when I worked with trainee teachers, my student group was predominantly female, and currently my work with social care and social work students means a preponderance of women in the classroom.

Applying a feminist perspective to this teaching supports empowerment, this is important in my teaching practice as many of the women I teach face multiple disadvantages that result from their gender as well as from other social locations they occupy. Male students in my classroom also face disadvantages that feminist pedagogy's potential to empower can support them to address. Empowerment of all is a goal in the feminist classroom, and in its pursuit,

strategies are employed to enable students to find and develop their own authentic voices without dissolving the authority of the teacher.

> ‘Empowering classrooms are places to practice visions of a feminist world, confronting differences to enrich all of us rather than to belittle some of us’ (Shrewsbury, 1997:169).

I am in accordance with Light (2015: 287) who says:

> ‘…we ought to empower them to value their own and others’ ideas about the world while recognizing how those ideas are culturally and historically specific.’

Of course use of the term ‘empowerment’ can be a problem too and needs exploring, Gore (1993: 57) advised of the dangers that may be entailed when a teacher acts as an agent of empowerment, as it might ‘attribute extraordinary abilities to the teacher’ which may not be possible to realise and which may ‘serve as instruments of domination, despite the intentions of their creators.’ (Gore, 1993: 54). As Macdonald (2002:119) notes classrooms contain individuals that that represent social groups from wider society who experience ‘…complex and layered relations of dominance and oppression.’. In her often-cited essay Ellsworth (1989) also expressed significant concerns about reproducing relations of domination whilst trying to undermine them.

Voice is linked to empowerment. Speaking out and speaking up are often viewed as central ingredients for women’s empowerment (Gal, 1991, Mahoney, 1996; Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017). It is a common belief that disempowerment is signalled by silence (Gatwiri and Mumbi, 2016). The following two quotes from bell hooks provide a clear sense of the place of voice in a feminist classroom:

> ‘Feminist and critical pedagogy are two alternative paradigms for teaching which have really emphasized the issue of coming to voice’ (hooks, 1994:185).

> ‘Often the feminist classroom was the only place where students (mostly female) from materially disadvantaged circumstances would speak from that class positionality, acknowledging both the impact of class on our social status as well as critiquing the class biases of feminist thought’ (hooks, 1994:181).

Indeed, let us not forget that initially one of the goals of feminism and feminist pedagogy was contribute to the ‘…disruption of power-hierarchies which have kept women silent’ (Culley, 1985:213). Dialogue as a means to promote equality and lead to liberation was also given emphasis in Paulo Freire’s approach. Dialogue was viewed as a means to crush the silence that dehumanizes:

> ‘Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world’ (Freire, [1970] 1996:69).

Empowered students can explore their own voices and subjectivities and supporting students to find and the use their voice has and continues to be central to how I apply my feminism in the classroom. My analysis chapters 5, 6, and 7 are good examples of how students’ voices can be shared. Oliver et al., (2017) argued that being able to speak up is necessary for the advocacy mandates of social work. These authors advocate that social work educators should engage in a ‘pedagogy of discomfort and identity theory’ (page 702), so difficult conversations can be had. The embodied learning, they advocate can be achieved in feminist classrooms, which foster the development of student courage and transparency.

Students’ contributions to discussions in feminist classroom can reflect their participation, engagement and enthusiasm; however, for many this assumption is problematic. A notion of voice that conflates it with empowerment has been problematised by Orner (1992) who offers a poststructuralist perspective in which she deconstructs the concept of voice and argues:

> ‘When calling for voice Anglo- American feminist and critical pedagogues call for students to find and articulate their voice, they presume singular, essential, authentic, and stable notions of identity’ (Orner, 1992:86).

Such an approach she sees as paternalistic, and asks teachers to explore voice more deeply, and identify if by calling for it they are indeed enacting oppression, perhaps validating some voices over others for example. bell hooks (1994) also identified the feminist classroom as a potential site of disengagement. She points out that some students already marginalised by oppression/s may find feminist teachers who challenge orthodox thinking too critical and may find silence their best response. If the feminist classroom is a site where voices are called forth and personal experiences shared, the feminist teacher, at least initially, needs to take responsibility for student safety and ensure privacy is not compromised or violated. bell hooks advises teachers to be aware of this and be also mindful of other conflicts and use this tension as a catalyst for new and innovative classroom practices. Care and nurture are important concepts in a feminist classroom, and in chapter 6 I explore these aspects more fully.

Student silence can be a useful site for examination (Orner, 1992; Ropers–Huilman, 1996). Interpretation of silences can support better understanding of communication processes (Letherby, 2003). Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010) suggest expanding notions of silence, they argue seeing it as a form of repression only is too narrow and advocate that silence can be productive. Further support for the productive possibilities of silence comes from Gatwiri and Mumbi (2016), who discuss African women’s responses to oppressive actions and say:

> ‘An African woman’s unassuming silent protest may reveal a deep and proactive understanding of her oppression-ridden situation and how it can subtly but effectively but non-confrontationally changed’ (Gatwiri and Mumbi, 2016:5).

Work by poststructural feminists gives emphasis to ‘…the contingent and discursive nature of *all* identities’ (Randall, 2010:116), and so supports understanding of different social locations. Such understanding is necessary for

social work as social justice is central to its practice and creating a more socially just world is also a key goal for feminist pedagogy (De Santis and Serafini, 2015). To help achieve this, feminist pedagogy can offer an approach that discourages a charity or helping model that places expertise in the hands the helper, and in so doing bolsters stereotyped thinking that blames individuals for their circumstances (Briskin, 2015). Challenging such views, Linda Briskin argues, can support students to recognise the structural roots of inequalities, and develop a desire to support empowerment of the individuals, groups and communities they work with. The necessity for critical pedagogies such as feminist teaching to expose and challenge structural oppression is according to Rohrer (2018: 576) increasingly vital in the 'Trump era'. Rodriguez and Huemmer (2019) have come to a similar conclusion. As stated in my first chapter, I began this project prior to the current visibility and attention afforded feminism, which has resulted in part from Donald Trump's victory in the Presidential election in the United Stated in 2016, a situation that serves to embolden my ambitions for this project.

Notwithstanding this, my motivations initially were influenced by a desire to counter the overwhelming march of neoliberalism contributing to the 'slow death of the university' (Giroux, 2011: 125). The neoliberal context that currently has a hegemonic influence on many universities (Singh, 2015; Caivano et al., 2016; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Bergland, 2018; Rhodes et al., 2018; Zhang, 2018) can be a problem too for feminist pedagogy, creating a hostile environment as '…feminist practice often sits in contradiction to the values of the neoliberal university' (Burton, 2018:129).

A neoliberal perspective is an ideology that morphed from economic liberalism and individualism, (David, 2016) and took hold in many Western nations in the final decades of the 20th century (Light et al., 2015; Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015; Mountz et al., 2015; Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017). It has travelled too, and is increasingly a global perspective (Mohanty, 2013; Spolander et al., 2014; Morley, 2016; Morley and Crossouard, 2016). It is an ideology that perverts feminist ideals in the pursuit of profit (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017), has led to managerialist practices that diminish teacher autonomy (Preston and Aslett, 2014), and limits opportunities for critical discourse (Motta, 2012). Zhang (2018)

discusses how the neoliberal agendas have appropriated and incorporated feminism in ways that neutralise its abilities to offer critique and create transformations. Liu (2019) also shows how destructive neoliberal discourses can be to feminist activity and feminists. Neoliberalism is:

> 'More than just free market economics, neoliberalism is a "rationality" that powerfully shares understandings of the subject's relationship to society so that individuals are understood as wholly responsible for their own self-governance, success or failure' (Wood and Litherland, 2018: 907).

Consequently, it has been identified as an area of great concern to social work researchers and writers (Webb, 2006; Rogowski, 2012; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; Rogowski, 2014a, 2014b; Fenton, 2016, 2018). I want to add my voice through this work to calls made by these authors to support critical thinking amongst social care and social work students, in order to revitalise debates about structural inequalities that neoliberal frameworks have diluted. Critical theory in the form of post-structural feminism can be of assistance here; as such an approach enables the valuing of diverse experiences (Ropers- Huilman, 1998), and many feminists and feminist pedagogues seek to resist the march of neoliberalism (Motta, 2012; Fraser, 2013a, 2013b; Silva Flores, 2015). Rohrer (2018: 576) said feminist pedagogies as critical pedagogies '…necessarily expose and challenge structural oppression.' The critical lens of feminist perspectives can counter the seduction of neoliberalism as:

> '…feminist classrooms are spaces where feminist university teachers can inject alternatives into mainstream content and practices, negotiate student responses and issues of power relationships within classrooms, and challenge the current marketization of HE in England.' (Sliva Flores, 2015:48/49).

In so doing to:

> '…create genuine alternatives to neoliberalism … build new kinds of alliances between teachers and students, workers and citizens…give rise

> to new conceptions both of education and of society more generally' (Singh, 2015 :18).

This work is urgent, especially in social care and social work education, as Fenton (2018) noted, younger social work students, and some qualified practicing social workers tend to accept neoliberal dogma readily, resulting in a tendency to identify social problems as the result of individual failings. My teaching experience at times confirms this conclusion. Deconstructing the neoliberal hegemony through encouraging critical thinking is, she argued vitally necessary. Feminist pedagogy can contribute to this resistance. In chapter 7 I discuss the narrative of 'Resistance and Defiance' found in my data, here I explore how the feminist space we created supported participants to share their stories of resistance as well as come to value it as a strategy for change.

As part of that resistance Llewellyn and Llewellyn (2015) suggest feminist pedagogy can support a restorative approach to learning that puts relationality at its core, and attends to, promotes, and protects positive relationships in a learning community (chapter 6 examines this in relation to the data for this thesis). Such an approach they argue can reduce neoliberalism's grip on universities. Many feminist critics of neoliberalism point to how it has appropriated emancipatory ideals and used them to create division by supporting some individuals to progress while collective change has been stalled and inequalities increased in many areas (Skeggs, 1995; David, 2016). As part of the challenge to neoliberalism bell hooks' words are once again important to recall:

> 'Feminist pedagogy can only be liberatory if it is truly revolutionary because the mechanisms of appropriation within white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy are able to co-opt with tremendous ease that which merely appears radical or subversive' (hooks, 1989:50&51).

Aside from this, other negative effects of teaching feminist ideas can be encountered in feminist classrooms, such as hostility prompted by a belief that the feminist struggle has been won (Langan and Davidson, 2005; McRobbie 2009, 2013; Gill and Scharff, 2011). For some students this belief makes a

teacher trying to engage them with structural perspectives tiresome, as these students view solutions to be found in individuals taking up opportunities that come their way (Budgeon, 2001). Jordan Titus reported four postures found in students in relation to women's inequality in a patriarchal society, they are 'deny, discount, distance, and dismay' (Titus, 2000:22). These were noted in the context of students as trainee teachers in a US university, and as a former teacher educator myself, I find resonances with this in my UK context. I was therefore mindful of this as I progressed this project and sought recruits for my feminist classroom. In my experience, solutions can be found to counteract this resistance, and Titus also reports being successful in working with students to produce more positive postures than the four above. Such stances can be seen to reflect the individualism found in neoliberal influences, as already discussed. My later analysis chapters 5, 6, and 7 further examine this.

These subsequent chapters also explore in more detail the concept of postfeminism, which is also relevant here. I have discussed this too in my first chapter. For now, I add that postfeminism has a powerful grip on many educational discourses as a result of its neoliberal connections (McRobbie 2009, Gill and Scharff, 2011; Scharff, 2012, Liu, 2019). It should be noted that when the biases of hegemonic ideologies are exposed, a central aim in feminist pedagogies (Lawson, 2011), antagonism can ensue (hooks, 1994). Sometimes in a further or higher education context, where you are working with adults, antagonism can come from students who enjoy privileges in other areas of their lives. These students may feel they have something to lose:

> 'The resistance to the spread of feminist principles and methodologies by those who are privileged by the prevailing social order has been sustained and widespread' (Dominelli, 2002:104**).**

Student response can also come in the form of accusations of bias, especially by those disinclined towards feminist perspectives (Silva Flores, 2015). In addition, feminist teachers can be met with suspicion and often students are not sympathetic:

> ‘The lecture podium can be a lonely place at the best of times, and anti-feminist resistance can be devastating’ (Menzies and Chunn, 1991:68).

> ‘Many people feel threatened and fearful of the diversity in our society and see it as divisive. Thus they reject, exclude, or strike out against those perceived to be different. Their attitudes have been formed by a barrage of distorted messages, misconceptions, and stereotypes about those who are different from themselves’ (McCormick, 1994: xiii).

A feminist teacher espousing messages different to mainstream values can sometimes be seen as too challenging, as Sanders (2001:62) remarked, ‘…feminist pedagogy can reinforce some students’ animosity towards us.’ This is disconcerting and uncomfortable, but advice from do Mar Pereira (2012) is to recognise the generative and transformative elements of discomfort and use them to create different universities, universities that can be different to the current neoliberal institutions. Negotiating and contesting teaching approaches is a constant state of affairs for feminist teachers (Lawson, 2011).

Establishing community in a teaching context can support resistance to the hyper-individualism of the neoliberal narrative (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017). Community is an essential component for a feminist classroom (Shrewsbury, 1997), and Kishimoto and Mwangi (2009) also identified collaboration and community building as crucial features of feminist pedagogy. Additionally:

> ‘Because feminists value community and equality, building a trusting environment in which all members are respected and have an equal opportunity to participate is central’ (Schniedewind, 1993: 18).

Being able to support the development of a community of learners is a further benefit of practicing feminist pedagogy. The collective knowledge production that a feminist classroom permits can enable community building (Shrewsbury, 1987, 1997; De Santis and Serafini, 2015). The concept of community can serve to redress individualistic biases (Orford, 1992). A basic definition of community states that it is a group of people who have something in common.

Commonalities are stressed in a feminist classroom, not in order to deny or elide differences but to support sharing. Of course, community as a term is used in many different ways and takes on different meanings in different contexts. In my teaching contexts I find resonances with Webb et al., (2004) who used it to describe a space where there is a shared purpose, and where the language of community is used, in such spaces 'we' and 'our' are used in order to constitute community, and facilitate collective decision-making. As Shrewsbury (1997:171) claimed:

> 'Feminist pedagogy includes teaching strategies that are based on a reconceptualization of community with a richness that includes the autonomy and individuality of members who share a sense of relationship and connectedness with each other.'

Creating a community necessitates a sharing of power, and as Coia and Taylor (2013:6) pointed out 'in feminist classrooms, power is always negotiated. It moves around the classroom and it demands vigilance.' Exploring power and authority are essential for feminist pedagogues; a feminist teacher needs to carefully and transparently attend to power and its connection to the teacher role and issues of authority (Ellsworth, 1989; Briskin and Coulter, 1992; Forrest and Rosenberg, 1997; Crabtree and Sapp, 2003). Briskin (2001) calls for the examination of the different forms power can take in a classroom and recognition that power dynamics can create inequities, regardless of initial aims to empower. It is necessary here to also note the need to problematise concepts of "we" and "us" in feminism, as my discussions in chapter 1 regarding Black women's and transnational women's perspectives highlighted. Subsequent chapters will also refer to this as I provide detail on the doing of this project, and my attempts to embody feminist pedagogical principles around community building and creating inclusive spaces.

For many feminist teachers problematising and conceptualizing power is an aim of their practice (Light, 2015), this necessarily entails struggle. Transforming power inequalities leads to another area of paradox for a feminist teacher who in doing so risks denying their own authority (Friedman, 1985; Lawson, 2011).

Feminist pedagogues '… run the risk of undermining the very social power we have fought so hard to obtain, and with additional professional consequences.' (Crabtree and Sapp, 2003:138). In my teaching experience I have worked to share power and at times been happy to relinquish it, but there are other times when I do not wish to be disempowered. Perhaps in contexts where students are anti feminists or when students think feminism is irrelevant today, when they display a postfeminist posture. In such situations it is necessary to strike a balance between empowering students and not disempowering yourself as a teacher, such a balance is not always easily achieved (Lather, 1991b; Manicom, 1992).

A further and crucial element in this discussion has been discussed by Lee and Johnson-Bailey (2004:55) who identify '…that feminist pedagogy and women of color can make for a dangerous liaison.'. Writing about their own experiences of teaching, they share dilemmas they faced as they practiced feminist pedagogy. Authority was one such area of dilemma, and they discuss how students in their experience showed more resistance in the form of apathy, and at times open hostility towards teacher authority when the teacher was a woman of colour. In such circumstances it is important that the teacher is not marginalised, and they conclude '…our classrooms are places where we make space for knowledge production and where we make space for all voices- including our own' (Lee and Johnson-Bailey, 2004:63). Lawson (2011) has also identified that as a Black woman she faces additional challenges when negotiating feminist pedagogical practices. Rodriguez et al., (2012) highlighted the need for more research into the experiences of women of colour engaging in liberatory pedagogies. Their work examined the ways in which their social locations (based on race and gender) impacted in negative ways on their experience of teaching social justice topics in predominantly white classrooms. In this research context my experience was the opposite, as a white teacher I found myself sharing my feminist classroom with students who were predominantly Black. This presented me with opportunities to enact intersectional feminist perspectives and show sensitivity to the criticism of white feminism posited by Black and transnational women and feminists (discussed in chapter 1). As my subsequent chapters will show, Black students in my context were responsive, positive, and enthusiastic

about the messages presented in our feminist space, a situation for which I am extremely grateful.

Of course, dilemmas can also be faced when students themselves may resist the teacher sharing power and afford her/him all the authority. Issues such as those in my earlier discussion on student anger and acceptance of traditional ideas about knowledge and the place of personal knowledge may be involved here. What this may reflect is Gore's (1993) claim that power is a slippery force, with contradictions and inconsistencies, such that teachers are not always the one who empowers the disempowered students. Foucault's (1980) examination of power as having a diffuse and ambiguous nature also has relevance here.

Linked to this discussion is the issue of expectations in a feminist classroom. Students who seem happy to afford the power and authority to the teacher, and teachers who may wish or feel obliged to take it may mean:

> 'Feminist teachers often struggle to maintain a delicate balance in pedagogy between over/under feeding students. A challenge is how to facilitate student development, without assuming the role of surrogate mother' (Shaw, 1995:146).

Morley (1998) reported on the emotional labour involved in feminist teaching practices, identifying that it can lead to the teacher offering quasi-therapeutic services. She points out that often this is offered without resources and acknowledgment, and this and the blurring of boundaries entailed here take their toll on a feminist teacher.

Emotional expression is a key element in feminist classrooms and is linked to building a culture of community (hooks, 1994), however, like power and authority, it is an area that needs constant monitoring. The ethic of care is at the heart of this emotion, and the feminist classroom is a place of nurturing and care (hooks, 1994; Lee and Johnson- Bailey, 2004; Linabary et al., 2016). After all a feminist classroom is:

> '…characterized as persons connected in a net of relationships with people who care about each other's learning as well as their own' (Shrewsbury 1997: 166)

These are concepts that are highly relevant to the context of this thesis and were evident in the data analysis. Therefore, a fuller discussion on these aspects of feminist pedagogy will be offered in chapter 6.

To conclude this part of the chapter, I have offered here a critical examination of the possibilities, potentials and pressures entailed in feminist pedagogy. Feminist perspectives have influenced educational establishments in numerous ways and in many countries. The influence of feminist ideas on education has not always been recognised or has been taken for granted. The work of feminist teachers has supported schools, colleges and universities to advance in such a way that it is sometimes hard to imagine the situations that gave rise to its development during the 'Second Wave' of feminism. My ambitions for this project are to extend this work in a social care/work education context where I believe such an approach is necessary and can produce important rewards that assist both social work and teaching. To further contextualise feminist pedagogy, I now turn my attention to its development, and in this next section of the chapter offer a review of the historical context to this approach to teaching and learning.

2.3 The Development of Feminist Pedagogy

In similarity with some of the debates discussed in chapter 1, a look at the history of feminist pedagogy must recognise the danger of offering a partial and limited account that contributes to the silencing processes that feminists aim to expose. Therefore, it is vitally important to note the global reach of feminist pedagogy and avoid offering a narrative that suggests only Anglophone countries have developed this approach to teaching. As Lawrence (2016) states, the wealth of U.S. literature on the topic means it is easy to see work from the U.S. as the dominant narrative, but work from many other countries, including Ethiopia, Japan and Austria has also contributed to debate and enabled commonalities to be explored. There are many stories of feminist pedagogy, the stories I offer here are situated in Western narratives, but it is not my intention to silence

voices. It is inevitable that some silencing may happen, and I only provide a partial narrative here. The Western context is the one in which I worked as I constructed this thesis and given these terms the Western context has more relevance in this instance.

In the West, feminist pedagogy developed to offer a challenge to traditional and mainstream pedagogical styles that made women and other marginalised groups passive and invisible. As Frances Maher writing in the 1980s, stated in her critique of mainstream teaching styles, 'women are silenced, objectified and made passive though both the course content and the pedagogical style of most college classrooms' (Maher, 1985:31). For her and others at this time, feminist pedagogy aimed to confront the patriarchal biases traditionally seen in educational contexts that resulted in neglect of women's perspectives and experiences as a form of knowledge (Freeman and Jones, 1980). It aimed to be '… a vision of what education might be like but frequently is not' (Shrewsbury, 1987: 6).

A key advocate of women's rights to education was poet and feminist theorist Adrienne Rich who elicited the following call:

> 'Women in the university therefore need to address themselves - against the opprobrium and obstruction they do and will encounter - to changing the center of gravity of the institution as far as possible; to work toward a woman-centered university because only if that center of gravity can be gifted will women really be free to learn, teach, to share strength, to explore, to criticize, and to convert knowledge to power' (Rich, 1979: 128).

Those who responded to this and similar calls aimed to support a revolution in classrooms:

> 'When contemporary feminist movement made its initial presence felt in the academy there was both an ongoing critique of conventional classroom dynamics and an attempt to create alternative pedagogical strategies' (hooks, 1994:180).

Initially this was a Western revolution, and feminist pedagogy in this context has its roots in the work of Western feminists who were campaigning in the 1970s and 1980s (Luke and Gore, 1992), it was a means by which feminist scholars could bring their philosophical and political ideals into their classrooms (Light et al., 2015). It emerged as a critical field in the 1980s with the intention of decentring androcentric theories and practices to enable a rethinking of teaching and learning (Nicholas and Baroud, 2015).

'Feminist pedagogy' was the label applied to the teaching methods employed as Women's Studies (WS) courses (now regularly referred to as Women's/Gender Studies (WGS)), proliferated in universities across the UK, Canada and the USA in the 1970s (Kirkup and Whitelegg, 2013; Bondy et al., 2015). It has been construed as integral to WS (Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009). The first WS course was established in 1970 in the USA and focused on women's concerns and sexism as it developed within the context of the 'Second Wave' of a strong women's movement (Stake, 2006). The women's movement juxtaposed the personal with the political and this was reflected in WS classrooms (Morley, 1998). Frequent themes in WS classrooms were consciousness raising, interactive learning and teaching, attending to the experience of being 'other', and renegotiating power and authority (Klein, 1987). Some of this thinking was critiqued in the 1990s as perspectives influenced by postmodernism proliferated, and WS became less popular in Western countries. 2008 saw the final BA in WS in a UK university close (Woodward and Woodward, 2009). This postmodern critique has been explored in more detail in the first chapter.

In their heyday WS courses produced a change of emphasis in classroom dynamics that was very different to what had been seen before:

> 'A style has evolved in classrooms, more dialogic, more exploratory, less given to pseudo-objectivity than the traditional mode' (Rich 1979:143).

Haraway (1991) has offered that during the women's liberation movement, the sharing of experiences afforded in women's community groups led to the development of feminist pedagogy. Sharing their experiences in this way was not

confined to American women. Many other countries, especially Western nations, or those in the 'Global North' (David, 2016:217) soon followed, and developed their own versions of WS programmes which responded to and shaped their own cultural, political and educational structures (Stake, 2006). These WS courses were viewed as '…the educational arm of the women's movement' (Klein, 1987:187), and teachers aimed to build an active connection with the women's movement and other organisations seeking social change (Briskin, 1990). In this endeavour it was then the job of WS courses '…to convey feminist theoretical perspectives and knowledge through the power of feminist pedagogy.' (Stake, 2007: 43). In the United Kingdom, feminist teachers' pedagogy in the1970s and early 1980s was informed by the visions they had for social transformation (Coate Bignell, 1996).

In the decades since the 1970s, WS established its presence in academic institutions as it developed as a discipline with its own theories, debates and methodologies (Bondy et al., 2015). Attempts to evaluate WS courses have identified that students judge the teaching and content to be both stimulating and positive (Letherby and Marchbank, 2001), and, that the goals of transforming students' understandings and inspiring feminist activism can be judged to have been achieved (Flood, 2011). The feminist pedagogy practiced in WS classrooms has been described as the '…gender-sensitive development of earlier Marxist-influenced radical pedagogy' (Morley, 1998:16). Such pedagogy is often termed critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy's relationship to critical pedagogy will now be explored.

2.4 Feminist Pedagogy's Links to Critical Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy shares many of the ambitions of other critical pedagogies, and many authors have acknowledged the close ties between feminist pedagogy and critical or emancipatory pedagogies (Fisher, 1981; Maher, 1985; Currie, 1992; Shrewsbury, 1997; McClure, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Markowitz, 2005; Leach and Moon, 2008). Frances Maher admits feminist pedagogy's debt to previous critical thinkers when she says that it: '… draws on the rich tradition … of

involving students in constructing and evaluating their own education.' (Maher, 1985:30). A few years later with a colleague she offered:

> 'Feminist pedagogy …evolved from many different sources: the consciousness-raising practices derived from the women's movement, the progressive tradition in American education created by John Dewy, and the more general forms of "liberatory teaching" espoused by Paulo Freire and others' (Maher and Thompson Tetreault, 2001:3).

Here the debt to and close ties with critical theories is acknowledged. Many critical pedagogues frame their practice around the work of Paulo Freire ([1970] 1996) and Henri Giroux (1988, 2003) both of whom acknowledged how important it is for teachers to recognise power relations in the classroom. These and other radical educators aimed to establish a schooling system that emancipated those oppressed and disempowered. Providing space for critical engagement with divergent perspectives in order to support students from disenfranchised populations to understand the impact of capitalism, gender, race and homophobia on their lives is a key aim of critical pedagogy (Darder, et al., 2017; Rodriguez and Huemmer, 2019). Clarke (2002:67) suggested:

> 'Teachers engaged in critical pedagogy are united in a view of education as a practice committed to the reduction, or even elimination, of injustice and oppression.'

Critical pedagogy is an international venture and a look at the history of the movement quickly identifies how radical educators working in different parts of the world shared ideals and ambitions about a radical education system that can transform lives and address inequalities. The term 'Critical pedagogy' is an American term, coined by Henri Giroux, the American and Canadian scholar who wrote the first textbook to use this term (Han et al., 2015). Giroux's now classic text, in critical pedagogy circles, *Theory and Resistance in Education* was published in 1983 and in here he argued for schools to take a role in creating a new society and recognise their potential as agents of social change. He also advocated applying the ideas of critical theorists from the Frankfurt School

(Giroux, 1983). The Frankfurt School established in 1923, was heavily influenced by the work of Karl Marx and evolved as a response to the political and cultural events in Europe in the early twentieth century; in particular the political tensions in Germany (Darder et al., 2009). The Frankfurt School challenged the place of scientific knowledge and the concept of objectivity, arguing that objective knowledge was unattainable as we are all immersed in contexts that influence us in ways we are not aware of (Wajcman, 2002). Jurgen Habermas' extensive work in developing critical theory based on the Frankfurt School traditions also has appeal to those interested in critical pedagogy (Murphy and Fleming, 2010). Indeed, critical pedagogy can be viewed as one outcome of this critical theory (Lather, 1998; McLaren, 2003).

Paulo Freire is a central figure in the Latin American liberation movement and has been described as '… the most influential theorist of critical and liberatory education (Weiler, 1991: 450) and '…the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy' (Breuing, 2011:4). bell hooks' pedagogy was profoundly influenced by Freire, who she says gave her a language and supported her to continue her resistance to racism, sexism and class exploitation. His work is far reaching and '…its central themes remain of utmost importance' (Batsleer, 2013:75). Freire's work supports the value of open dialogue as a way to generate critical thinking, and this is as crucial today as it was in the past (Rodriguez and Huemmer, 2019).

Freire worked initially with Brazilian peasants, teaching them to read. In the course of this work he developed a style of pedagogy that encouraged the students to challenge the teacher and placed 'individuals' prior knowledge and experiences at the heart of pedagogy' (Leach and Moon, 2008: 20). Freire was also keen to support the voice of the student, as he believed this would lead to the development of critical awareness or 'conscientisation'. This process can act as a means to support "the poor" to free themselves from their oppressors and regain their humanity. Freire ([1970] 1996) argued that humanisation was everyone's vocation, but actions of oppressors thwart this and the oppressed work to recapture their stolen humanity.

Freire's work and his key concepts of dialogue, praxis, and conscientisation have been modified over the years. Nevertheless, many aspects of the key ideology have remained intact, as Weiler (1991:455) states:

> 'The ethical stance of Freire's pedagogy in terms of praxis and his articulation of people's worth and ability to know and change the world are an essential basis for radical pedagogies in opposition to oppression.'

Freire's and other Marxist influenced ideas guide and remain at the heart of critical pedagogies, their work has made a significant contribution to the role of education as a means to raise awareness of social injustices and promote social equality, and not limiting it to imparting knowledge and preparing students for careers (Stake, 2006). They have inspired a teaching practice that is:

> '… fundamentally committed to the development and enactment of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalised and economically disenfranchised students. By so doing, this pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life' (Darder, et al., 2009: 9)

Like many feminists I see a value in the work of critical pedagogues, but find insufficient attention is given to gender in some of their work. Feminist pedagogy attends to women's lives and oppression in a way that is not shared by other critical pedagogies, but they can complement each other. bell hooks was heavily influenced by Freire, and her interpretation and development of his arguments and ideals adds a much needed feminist voice to his work (Nicholas and Baroud, 2015).

For many feminists, feminist pedagogy is sufficiently and substantively different to warrant its own title, and as Shrewsbury (1997: 172) said; 'it has close ties with other liberatory pedagogies, but it cannot be subsumed under other pedagogical approaches.' For many feminists subsuming it under other approaches would not

best serve the aims of WS courses and feminism. Shrewsbury (1997:167) also said:

> ‘At its simplest level, feminist pedagogy is concerned with gender justice and overcoming oppressions. It recognizes the genderedness of all social relations and consequently of all societal institutions and structures.’

Weiler (1991) argues that the universal truths and assumptions about a collective experience of oppression found in many critical theories do not chime with the tension filled classrooms of feminist scholars who have identified that different experiences of oppression can divide students and teachers. Elizabeth Ellsworth provided a scathing criticism of critical pedagogies referring to its ‘repressive myths’ (Ellsworth, 1989: 297). Her key concerns are expressed in the following quote which reflects a number of postmodernism’s concerns about modernism’s rational subject:

> ‘Yet social agents are not capable of being fully rational and disinterested; and they are subjects split between the conscious and unconscious and among multiple social positionings. Fundamental moral and political principles are not absolute and universalizable, waiting to be discovered by the disinterested researcher/teacher; they are “established intersubjectively by subjects capable of interpretation and reflection”’ (Ellsworth, 1989: 316).

Ellsworth was heavily criticised for this (Bizzell, 1991) but also praised by Lather (1991b) for taking on the canons of critical pedagogy. Certainly, Ellsworth has contributed to a critique of critical pedagogy that many feminists would agree with. She has contributed to the recognition of relationality and the important role it plays in the classroom (Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015). She has also laid the groundwork for later writers to critique. This can be seen in the work of Janet Batsleer who makes a similar point in her discussion of critical pedagogies, when she asserts, they have:

> '…enabled strong critiques of the objectification of 'youth' and have pointed to the fundamental necessity of dialogue in education, they have sometimes neglected to analyse the extent to which educators themselves, including critical educators, are ambivalently caught in webs of power and control. The recognition of the situatedness of all educational practice (and both the losses and gains associated with it) is a significant contribution of feminist thinking about practicing otherwise' (Batsleer, 2013: 294).

When critiquing critical pedagogies, feminist scholars influenced by poststructural arguments have been uneasy about 'the metanarratives of liberation…' (Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015:14) offered. These two authors also claim that discourse in critical pedagogy offers universalising conceptions, which posits a rational androgynous subject moved to challenge inequalities. Such a subject is regularly clearly located as a male, so male privilege continues (Luke, 1992). Along similar lines, Braidotti (2013) critiqued critical theory for its tendency to consecrate a white male canon.

Foregrounding gender and women's oppression in particular, as feminist pedagogy does, ensures the silencing of women and girls must be challenged. A feminist vision therefore offers something else to the debate, consequently, it is vitally important that feminist pedagogy is not subsumed into other critical pedagogies, such an occurrence would mean that gender may become marginalised as a site of discussion and development. Feminist pedagogy must resist being appropriated or co-opted by other pedagogical perspectives (Silva Flores, 2015). Through this work I want to add my voice to such calls and claims.

By not allowing itself to be a corollary of critical pedagogy or indeed, other related pedagogies, and remaining separate and distinct, feminist pedagogy can help critical and related pedagogies to develop and evolve, as feminist pedagogy can re-envision emancipatory pedagogy and in so doing develop a pedagogy that recognises the complex interaction between a universal goal of liberation and subjective positions and diversity. As Weiler (1991) in her critique of Freire argues, feminist pedagogies can enrich and expand Freirean pedagogies by

raising critical questions about the role of the teacher, personal experience as a source of truth or knowledge and how different subjectivities challenge unitary and universal assumptions. As feminist teachers are '… aware of the ways in which the pedagogical situation may reproduce discriminatory, even destructive, attitudes and expectations about women' (Culley and Portuges, 1985:2), they are well placed to support the full development of critical pedagogy approaches. Therefore, I will reiterate my contention that in a social care/work education context such an approach to teaching is essential.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

Teachers have a suite of pedagogies that they can align themselves to, many overlap as they have similar starting points and aims. Feminist pedagogy is one of an array of critical pedagogies that claim to place a critical lens at the heart of teaching practice. Writers who promote socially just pedagogies (Lingard, 2005; Goodley, 2007; Cumming-Potvin, 2009), inclusive teaching (Florian & Linklater 2010; Florian, 2014), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991a, 1991b, 1996) and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Berry, 2010) all trouble concepts of transformation, empowerment, emancipation, radicalisation, social justice and democracy, and set effecting social change as a key aim. Such pedagogies deliberately resist the positivistic notions of traditional teaching styles, where the teacher is the one who holds the knowledge (Hinchey, 2010). Such traditional teaching styles are opposed by critical pedagogues, who consider it important to recognise the political aspects that pervade classrooms, such as the social injustices in the lives of students, which inevitably influence the teaching and learning experience. Feminist pedagogy can consider itself to make a significant contribution in this area too. It is an approach to teaching that enhances creative and critical thinking by blending many different and varied teaching methods in order to avoid offering narrow and one-dimensional perspectives (Shackelford, 1992). As such it has much to offer social care/work teaching contexts.

Feminist classrooms are diverse and offer variety, 'feminist pedagogy does not assume that all classrooms are alike' (Shrewsbury, 1997:172), and the feminist

classroom is a rich ecology rather than a monoculture (Coia and Taylor, 2013). This means that:

> '…assuming a singular meaning to feminist pedagogy is … problematic. Just as there are multiple feminisms, so there are multiple feminist pedagogies – for example, anti-racist feminist pedagogies, liberal feminist pedagogies, socialist feminist pedagogies, queer pedagogies, and intersectional feminist pedagogies' (Briskin, 2015: 66).

Like feminism, feminist pedagogy is not a monolithic and unitary concept; rather it is a movable, tractable and dynamic practice. There are multiple feminisms and multiple feminist pedagogies. Feminist pedagogies are diverse and multifaceted in nature with core goals of emancipation and liberation underpinning what is taught and how it is taught (Storrs and Mihelich, 1998). Feminist pedagogy is also contradictory, but it does share core values, this is something most authors acknowledge **(**Lawson, 2011; Louise-Lawrence, 2014). De Welde et al., (2013:115) identified '…shared power, democracy, and the inclusion of marginalized voices', as key components in a feminist classroom. This therefore enables the potential for innovation in teaching practice, for example Ruth Nicole Brown writes about 'hip-hop feminist pedagogy' as a space to empower black girls to mediate the intersections of their race, class, gender, age and sexuality (Brown, 2009). Briskin (2015:57) advocates 'Activist Feminist Pedagogies' as a means to support students to make changes in their own communities. Llewellyn and Llewellyn (2015) discuss incorporating relational theory in feminist pedagogy as a means by which the connectedness of people can be acknowledged in learning.

As well as being diverse, feminist pedagogies are responsive and have developed as debates in feminism have emerged and been responded to. The writing about feminist pedagogy in earlier decades reflects so-called 'Second Wave' feminist thinking. Work in later decades reflects the influence of post theories as feminists engaged with postmodern and poststructural ideas, and the interlocking issues that affect women's lives and the lives of students from other marginalised groups. Indeed, as the decades have passed the influence of

feminism in the classroom has crossed many disciplines and enabled much cross-discipline debate (Light et al., 2015; Lawrence, 2016). It also has been shown to have the potential to support the learning of both/all genders (Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Flood, 2011).

Feminist pedagogy is a dynamic process of interaction that offers new possibilities in teaching and learning processes. It inevitably involves discomfort and challenge, as it requires constant monitoring of one's own values, positioning and practices. It has to be said that identifying oneself as a feminist in a classroom is often met with mixed responses. Sara Ahmed writes about how aligning oneself with feminism casts you as alienated from happiness, you are averse to the 'happiness script' (Ahmed, 2010: 70), a killjoy. In academic environments that are increasingly characterised as precarious, to be the feminist killjoy can be even more challenging and uncomfortable and may be responded to by silence on the part of the killjoy (Murray, 2018). Silva Flores (2015) discusses interviews she conducted with feminist academics in UK higher education contexts, and reports that some worry about negative reactions connected with labelling themselves feminists. However, importantly Ahmed (2010) also notes killing joy can be joyful too.

Consequently, '…being a feminist has always been dangerous inside and outside the academy.' (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017:2), and much feminist pedagogy has been developed in unsupportive climates, with many feminist pedagogues working in institutions that resist change (Weiler, 1995). In addition, power relations in educational settings tend to mean that it gets marginalised (Woodward and Woodward, 2009; De Welde et al., 2013) and in some cases deliberately undermined (Crabtree and Sapp, 2003). Black teachers and teachers of colour can feel this danger more sharply (Lee and Johnson-Bailey 2004; Lawson, 2011).

Tension is also created by the neoliberal context that currently has a hegemonic influence on UK universities (Mountz et al., 2015; Singh, 2015; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017), these tensions have to be faced and navigated. Feminism as a perspective for practice in teaching and social

work/care education contexts is a vital force that can support both fields to realise their transformative and emancipatory ambitions centred on eliminating injustice and oppression. I am in accord with Lee and Johnson-Bailey (2004: 63) who assert:

> '…we embrace feminist pedagogy as our preferred means of practice and continue to see it as the best way of providing and creating an inclusive environment.'

Burton (2018:133) after examining ways in which feminist academics engage with neoliberal universities asked, 'Is there a way of countering the neoliberal university through the continued creation of institutional space oriented to feminist practice?' It is my hope that this research informed by the knowledge and debates in feminist pedagogy outlined in this chapter can provide an answer to this question. What feminist pedagogy can do is more important to me than how it should be defined, a sentiment shared by Mackinlay (2016). Therefore, in this chapter, as well as showing due cognizance of the extensive literature in this area, I have explored the dimensions of what it means to embody feminism as a university teacher today. This narrative is not finished yet, and my subsequent chapters add to it. In the next chapter I discuss the research process I undertook for this work as I established a feminist classroom with students aspiring to be professional social workers and based this on the feminist pedagogical principles outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3 - Research Processes: Connecting Epistemology, Methodology and Methods.

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter explicates and interrogates the research processes I employed in the study. A researcher's epistemology or '…theory of knowledge.' (Harding, 1987:3) delineates assumptions about what can be known and who can be knower, which in turn guides and influences research decisions. Epistemology '… shapes the vision of one's research' (Sharp and Weaver, 2015:310), as it is a belief system that has significant authority in our research (Ackerly and True, 2008). Consequently, the theoretical axis on which a social researcher is located impacts on the research journey from start to finish, and ideas about knowledge then in turn determine ideas about research methodology (Landman, 2006; Marchbank and Letherby, 2006). A research methodology '…comprises rules that specify how social investigation should be approached… to produce *valid knowledge of social reality*…' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:11). The 'rules' that specified my approach to this investigation were shaped by feminist and qualitative research principles, aims and practices. Previous chapters have indicated my engagement with feminism and the key role it has in this thesis. In this work I want to contribute to knowledge and understanding of both feminist pedagogy and feminist research.

The previous chapter examined the literature on feminist pedagogy and made the case for its relevance in social care/work education contexts, especially as a response to neoliberal agendas, this chapter discusses feminist research. The first part of this chapter explores its development, key concepts, and some key debates, such as those pertaining to feminist standpoint positions. Discussions about reflexivity and ethics are also included as the chapter develops chapter, as these are important areas for examination in feminist research practices. As the literature on feminist research is extensive, I have not attempted to synthesise this into a definitive account, rather I aimed to discuss aspects that have relevance to this thesis, and my approach to it. For example, the connections between feminist research and social work are discussed. As this thesis also

adopts a qualitative approach, an examination of the qualitative paradigm then follows. Again, the extensive literature in this area will be used in relation to how it is connected to the current study. These discussions will provide insights into my ontological and epistemological stances on key issues underpinning this study such as teaching, learning, research, gender, race, and the intersections between these and other subjectivities. In previous chapters I have examined my subjectivities and explored how they shape the direction of this research, I build on this discussion here, tailoring it more explicitly to the research processes I followed.

As a thorough examination of the researcher's vision, assumptions, and philosophical stances precedes choice of methods (Harvey, 2013), after the discussions above, the subsequent parts of this chapter outline the methods I used or my '...technique (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence.' (Harding, 1987:2). Here I narrate the story of the research in relation to the 'doing' of it, so study design (feminist action research), and data collection processes (focus groups, interviews, reflective journals), are illuminated in these later parts of the chapter. I conclude with a summary of my key contestations and arguments in relation to the research processes undertaken for this thesis. Data analysis is explored in detail in the next chapter, as the data analysis method chosen, namely the Listening Guide, is an intensive and detailed approach (Brown and Gilligan, 1992, 1993; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Gilligan, 2015; Petrovic et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2016). I therefore consider a separate chapter is required in order to fully explicate the use of it as a tool to make sense of the data.

3.2 Feminist Research – Characteristics and Principles

> 'Feminist research …has much to contribute to understanding and addressing the gendered contexts of college, universities and education policies.' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011: 667).

My support for statements such as this prompted me to shape this thesis in terms of the characteristics and principles of feminist approaches to research. How

such an approach proceeds and the strategies it entails are topics of much discussion in research literature (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014; Sharp and Weaver, 2015). In addition, whether or not it is possible to claim there is a feminist methodology is contested in what Rutherford (2011: 175) described as 'lively debate'. Some of this debate is explored as the early sections of this chapter develop.

Feminist researchers use the same tools as other researchers (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011), they do not confine themselves to one method, rather, many advocate diversity of methods (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Mason, 1997; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Letherby, 2004a; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Sprague, 2005; Pasque and Errington Nicholson, 2011) and multiple methods may even be used in the same study (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This plurality reflects the different voices, visions and experiences of the many feminist activists and researchers across the spectrum of feminism (Brooks and Hesse–Biber, 2007; Hesse–Biber, 2012). The broad spectrum of ideas that constitute feminism does not necessarily prevent coalitions between positions, it is possible to find what Franks (2002:38) called 'moments of agreement'**.** However, it is difficult to argue that there is a specific feminist method, methodology, or epistemology (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2012). It is clear that there is '…no recipe for doing feminist research…' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 173), and '…no singular feminist methodology.' (Burns and Chantler, 2011: 70). Yet, it is important to discuss what distinguishes feminist research from other ways of doing research.

De Vault (1993:83) described feminist research as '…a distinctive approach to the investigation of social life and organisation.' Following this, an important question is "What gives it its distinction?" For Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) feminist research's distinctiveness lies in the theoretical, political, and ethical concerns that imbue the approach taken. Doucet and Mauthner (2006: 40) argue '…it is the case that feminist scholars have embraced particular characteristics in their work.' Some of these characteristics are shared with other researchers who may not describe themselves as feminists yet are aligned to feminism's goal to critique and reimagine the practices and aims of research. For example, Eldridge

et al., (2000) point out; feminism is not the only social movement to challenge partial standpoints.

Feminist researchers eschew prescriptive definitions for their approach, preferring to be illustrative when they write about their approaches, rather than provide a rigid list of criteria that must be followed, (Waller, 2005). Key concepts (Hughes, 2002), core agreements (Burns and Chantler, 2011), guiding principles (Lapan et al., 2012; Gray et al., 2015), and broad considerations (Sharp and Weaver, 2015) might be the best ways to summarise feminist research. It is possible that even these may be too rigid for some, but after Lather (2007:129) I would argue that some guidance is always helpful, as it can promote 'visibility and enunciation.' Of course, these principles and concepts are not constant, and will alter as feminism changes, adapts and evolves. After all, as my previous chapters have also argued:

> 'Feminism is not a static notion; rather, it evolves with us throughout our lives and is shaped by the various lenses we use to view the world at large, and most importantly, ourselves' (Errington Nicholson and Pasque, 2011:3).

Indeed, Burns and Chantler (2011) point out, research methodologies and foci chosen by feminists are changeable and influenced by historical, social and political moments linked to feminist struggles. One's feminist perspective and disciplinary norms will also influence method choice (Miner et al., 2012). Feminist researchers have a vast literature to draw on as they shape their projects, and perhaps the range of views and positions taken reflects Ramazanoglu's (1992: 208) pragmatic claim that 'what one means by feminist methodology depends in part on which authors one takes as examples.'

Many aspects of the various formulations of feminist research chimed with my own ambitions for this thesis, such as the following common principles of feminist research praxis from Hesse-Biber (2012), who offers that feminist researchers:

- Ask new questions

- Aim to access subjugated knowledge
- Take seriously issues of power, authority, ethics, and reflexivity
- Often work at the margins of their disciplines
- Seek social change and social transformation

In addition, McCormick (2013:24) offered the following characterisation, which she notes implies high and standards that may at times be difficult to achieve:

> 'There is clearly a concern for reflexivity and placing the researcher in the same world as those being researched. There is a need for the work being done to be political in some way - to contribute to the transformation of society in a way that is beneficial to oppressed persons. There is a concern that the research be ethical, in that it not cause harm to those being researched, and that it give voice to the voiceless.'

The feminist space/classroom that the students and I created for this study aimed to raise consciousness and achieve some of these ideals through mutual sharing of experience and emotion. An aim of this was then to build relationships based on respect and cooperation (some of the results of this are explored in chapter 6). Effecting change at both individual and wider levels, for example in their future practice as social care/work practitioners, was a further ambition, and chapter 5 discusses this in more detail. Bloom and Sawin (2009) and Rizvi (2019:48) stress that feminist researchers should aim to make practical differences to the lives of participants they work with, this requires the researcher to adopt a 'stance that addresses the researcher's privilege in the field'. I therefore carefully attended to reflexivity and ethical considerations as I progressed this study. Both of these are discussed more fully in a later part of this chapter. For now, the next section of the chapter further examines some of the key ideas and debates in the development of feminist research praxis.

3.3 Origins of Western Feminist Research

The origins of Western feminist research are in the activism of 'Second Wave' feminist movements, as it is 'connected in principle to feminist struggle' (Sprague and Zimmerman, 1993: 266). This feminist activism in the late 1960s and 1970s in educational institutions in the United States of America resulted in a realisation that mainstream research bore little relation to the lived experiences of women. As a challenge to the invisibility and distortion of female experiences, feminists developed more 'methodologically innovative' work as they searched for 'pattern and meaning, rather than prediction and control in research ventures.' (Lather, 1991b: 72). Feminists called attention to how results from research reflected '…sexist affirmations of popular (pre) conceptions about the superiority of men and the inevitability of women's subordination.' (Wylie et al., 1989: 379), and they sought to rework traditional techniques to create new models for research (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

In this effort of reconfiguration, some early characterisations of feminist research saw it as exclusive to women as it was 'for, by, about, and with women' but importantly not 'on women' (Oakley, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Fonow and Cook, 1991, 2005; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014). Burman (2012:650) recognises this exclusivity was a 'necessary corrective to malestream models…' but argues it is not a tenable way to describe feminist research today, as such an approach institutes its own exclusions. However, this is not to say that there is no longer a need to correct 'malestream' dominance in research or that feminist research that supports this earlier focus does not have legitimacy in some contexts. As Brooks and Hesse–Biber (2007: 4) note, there are:

> '… many women-centered issues and concerns that continue to motivate feminist activists and underscore the need for feminist, women-centered research.'

Pre feminist approaches to research were termed by O' Brien (1981) as 'malestream', which can be defined as a description of how 'the dominant conventions, notions and ideas throughout Western history have rationalized and legitimized male dominance' (Hansen, 1993: 81). In a response to malestream,

feminist empiricists attempted to correct bias by including women in research samples and devising questions that supported the hearing of women's perspectives and experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012). The relentless critique of these feminist scientists supported the development of a number of debates by feminist philosophers who examined the relationship between feminism and epistemology (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006).

Despite debates about the category of 'woman' such as those explored in my earlier chapter, concepts of gender and /or women are still central in many attempts to define feminist research as the following quotes exemplify:

> 'Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry' (Lather, 1991b: 71).

> 'Feminist researchers start with the political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women's lives through social and individual change' (Letherby, 2003: 4).

> Feminist analyses can be '…characterised by ongoing struggle around the proliferation of contested visions of gender equality and different debates on notions of gender, sex, and relations of domination and subordination' (Lombardo and Verloo, 2009: 110).

> 'Feminist research, by definition, is committed to considering how gender implicates or is implicated by the phenomenon of interest. Most often, this focus leads feminist researchers to consider how women experience various aspects of their lives…' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011: 671).

> 'Research is considered "feminist" when it is grounded in the set of theoretical traditions that privilege women's issues, voices, and lived experiences' (Hesse–Biber, 2014: 3).

From the outset, feminist scholars challenged bias in research endeavours in science and social science. For example, Dorothy Smith was a key critic of the

academic culture in which women were marginalised, and their experiences and perspectives overlooked, meaning research accounts therefore did not speak to women as:

> 'Men attend to and treat as significant only what men say…What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men. Men listened and listen to what one another said' (Smith, 1978:281).

She also argued that 'sociology has been based on and built up within the male social universe' (Smith, 1974: 7). Others who shared the view that malestream influences in research methods have shaped knowledge joined Smith, and consequently many feminist researchers challenged and disrupted ideas about knowledge through an explicit discussion of epistemology in their work. For example, Dale Spender focused on gender and knowledge building, and noted:

> 'Most of the knowledge produced in our society has been produced by men…they have created men's studies (the academic curriculum), for, by not acknowledging that they are presenting only the explanation of men, they have 'passed off' this knowledge as human knowledge' (Spender, 1981: 1).

Issues in knowledge creation such as masculinity, power, and authority were grappled with as feminists across a range of academic disciplines sought to establish a distinct epistemology (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). Fine (1992) charted a number of ways in which feminist psychologists could produce transformations in scholarship and politics, by interrogating how women and men are positioned in their personal lives. Such activities contributed to a deconstruction of traditional knowledge frameworks as:

> '… feminist researchers began to interrogate, disrupt, modify, and, at times, radically challenge existing ways of knowing within and across their disciplines, creating a shift in the tectonic plates of mainstream knowledge building' (Hesse–Biber, 2012: 9).

Recurring questions about who can be a knower, what can be known and how we know what we know continue to create tensions and dilemmas as epistemologies are discussed by feminist theorists (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2014).

3.4 Feminist Standpoint

Women's experience as a primary source of knowledge became central to a feminist standpoint epistemology that was developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Standpoint theory is '…a key theoretical development in second wave feminist research.' (Burns and Chantler, 2011: 71). Standpoint theory has Marxist theory roots, and enabled feminists aligned to Marxist ideas to articulate a resistance stance (Hekman, 1999). Postcolonial feminist challenges, such as those discussed in chapter 1, have also contributed to developing standpoint theory contributing to an intersectional analysis where structural aspects of social life, such as race and class are recognised as affecting the experience of oppression (Narayan, 1997; Collins, 2000; Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005; Hesse–Biber, 2014; Nadar, 2014).

Smith (1978) was an early proponent of standpoint who argued that research should start with women's lives. In agreement, Sandra Harding argued women's experiences can provide 'more complete and less distorted knowledge claims' (Harding, 1987: 184). The basic premises of standpoint theories are that '…the lived experiences of the subjugated are the best sources for constructing a socially transformative knowledge' (D'Cruz, 2008: 34), and '…women's social location is a resource for the construction of a uniquely feminist perspective on social reality' (McCann and Kim, 2013:6). The contention therefore is that as a consequence of oppression, less powerful members of society experience a different reality, which affords access to types of knowledge that the socially privileged do not have (Keeling and van Wormer, 2012).

According to Intemann (2010), Sandra Harding's view of a standpoint is that it is more than one's perspective, it is a distinctive insight achieved through critical, conscious refection on how hierarchical structures work to influence knowledge

production. Wylie (2003: 31) offers it is '… a critical consciousness about the nature of our social location and the difference it makes episitemically.' Feminist theory commits itself to understanding how knowledge is linked to power, and a set of political relations, and acknowledges epistemic marginality, the idea that knowledge production can be linked to social injustices (Madhok and Evans, 2014).

Patricia Hill Collins supports a standpoint perspective, and troubles epistemological notions in her work as she shows the importance of self-defined knowledge and asserts that the analyses of the experiences of Black women lead to perspectives that could not be arrived at by those who do not share this experience (Collins, 2000).

> 'Knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance. By objectifying African-American women and recasting our experiences to serve the interests of elite white men, much of the Eurocentric masculinist worldview fosters Black women's subordination. But placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques. Viewing the world through a both/and conceptual lens of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression and of the need for a humanist vision of community creates new possibilities for an empowering Afrocentric feminist knowledge. Many Black feminist intellectuals have long thought about the world in this way because this is the way we experience the world' (Collins, 1991: 221 and 222).

Consequently, feminist research makes a contribution to knowledge via offering a different authorial voice, in this case the voice of Black women. Giving voice to women's experiences is a means to access subjugated knowledge. Two further examples of this have been provided by feminist geographer Andrea Nightingale and ethnographer Yasmina Katsulis. Nightingale (2003) applied feminist standpoint to explore issues of land forest usages in Nepal, and Katsulis (2009)

examined the lived experiences of girls and women working in Mexico's sex industry.

Early critics of this feminist standpoint approach argued it does not recognise diversity in women's experiences, especially in relation to other subjectivities women have, as it posits a single woman standpoint. Some charge it as being too essentialist, and Eurocentric as it distills all women into white, and Western (Hesse-Biber, 2012). However, I argue that Collins', Nightingale's and Katsulis' uses of it negate some of this critique. Other critics say it reinforces gender stereotypes, and assumes all oppressed groups share universal experiences (Haack, 1998), and Koertge (2012) argues that feminist research may not always be well served by gendering epistemology and doing so may even be detrimental to women.

Postmodern and poststructural influences on feminism in the 1990s (as discussed in chapter 1) also contributed to a decline in the influence and popularity of a standpoint feminism, as Marxist /Socialist/Materialist feminisms were pushed to the margins (Hekman, 2014). Post theories (postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism) quashed ideas about a feminist way of knowing and resulted in more complex questions being raised about knowledge claims (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). Feminist poststructuralists deem knowledge to be socially produced, context bound, and unstable, they place an emphasis on language and discourse (Hesse–Biber, 2014). Postmodernism's focus on discourse enables exploration of how language creates, maintains and reinforces repressive structures (Frost and Elichaoff, 2014).

However, supporters of feminist standpoint theories have responded to the various criticisms, and ideas have undergone a range of iterations over time, including incorporating the concept of multiple standpoints (Hesse-Biber, 2012). It has become more nuanced since its introduction (Intemann, 2010), and '…remains an extremely important approach within feminist theory' (Hesse-Biber, 2014: 33). Sandra Harding welcomes these areas of controversy arguing that they provide another valuable resource to feminism and reminding us that:

> ‘After all this controversy, what is significant is that standpoint theory appears not only to have survived but also to be flourishing anew after almost four decades of lively debate about and within it.’ (Harding, 2012: 60).

I wish to stress that like many authors who support standpoint, I too recognise that context matters, and:

> ‘…the standpoints of the subjugated are not “innocent” positions…they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge’ (Haraway, 1988 :416).

In this study I wanted learning to develop from the standpoints or social locations of the participants. I aimed to support and facilitate participants in this study to develop understanding of anti-oppressive practices and perspectives through exploring their own standpoints. This understanding I hoped would support them professionally, in future careers as social workers, and personally, as women and men experiencing disadvantages themselves as a result of structural inequalities. Many social work writers stress the essential role of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive perspectives/practices (AOP), as a means to fulfil the social work aim to facilitate social change, empowerment and self-determination. AOP is seen as an essential methodological and theoretical paradigm for the profession (Danso, 2015).

> ‘AOPs should entail the social worker’s addressing the needs and assets of service users, challenging the oppressive structures and, most importantly, critically challenging the power dynamics in the service-provider/service-user relationship’ (Sakamoto and Pitner, 2005: 435).

Indeed, in social work education, AOPs are viewed as a key means of supporting students to develop understanding of structural oppression (Collins and Wilkie, 2010; Rogers, 2011). After all:

> ‘AOP advocates contend that the roots of the problems people face lie not in personal failings but in oppressive social structures and relations’ (Danso, 2015: 573).

Further, social work is a field in which there is greater sensitivity to developing a commitment to end all forms of oppression, as a consequence, social work education is infused with information about diversity, oppression and marginalised individuals and groups (Gentlewarrior et al., 2008; Fenton, 2014, 2016, 2018). As a consequence, in this project I wanted to support students to develop their practice in the direction of becoming critical reflective agents. To develop social work practice in this direction it is important to situate service users within broader structural constraints (Herz and Johansson, 2011). In addition, anchoring social work practice in critical theory can support it to develop more ethical and reflexive ways of practicing (Herz and Johansson, 2012). This then supports a move to social workers acting as active and critical reflective agents, rather than simple technicians constrained by neoliberal policies (Soldatic and Meekosha, 2012). It is possible therefore to see compatibility between social work’s and standpoint theory’s concerns for people at the margins (Keeling and van Wormer, 2012). The links between feminism and social work research, theory and practice are also topics of lively debate. I explore some of these in the next section of this chapter.

3.5 Feminist Research and Social Work

My earlier chapters have already noted the links between feminism and social work. In chapter 1 for example, I discussed feminism’s influence on theory and practice in social work. In chapter 2 I made the case for adopting feminist pedagogical principles in social work education, arguing in neoliberal climates this is particularly crucial. In terms of feminist research ‘…social work has been notably absent from broader social science conversations about feminist research’ (Wahab et al., 2012:455). Indeed, social work research of any kind has been limited in the UK as barriers exist (Sharland, 2009; Moriarty et al., 2015), and Teater et al., (2016:85) noted ‘…research by social work academics remains limited, hindered by lack of time, support infrastructures, funding and training.’

This may change now that social work educators are mostly employed by universities and the requirement to be research active may increase the research output, but of course funding and other pressures will have an impact too (Manthorpe and Moriarty, 2016).

In the research that has been conducted in social work contexts a feminist presence has been evident. For example, Mason (1997: 10) a social worker, asked 'Is there a feminist method?' and concluded that principles rather than methods define feminist social work research. She also requested that social work researchers engage more explicitly with feminist principles in their work. Orme (2002, 2003) also asked for a deeper and more critical engagement between social work and feminism, arguing this would enrich social work, supporting it more in the direction of just practices. Additionally, Gringeri et al., (2010) developed this further by examining fifty social work research articles where authors linked feminism with their work. They concluded that while feminist research debates have supported feminist social workers to develop and extend their research practices, more engagement with reflexivity and the discourses of contemporary critical feminisms would strengthen social work research's contribution to debates. Given social work's concern with social change and social justice, and its historical grounding in praxis, feminist social work researchers are well positioned to contribute to the more sophisticated and nuanced debates in critical feminisms (Wahab et al., 2012). Additionally, as Fraser and MacDougall (2017) claim, feminist research practices can support social work researchers to address important questions about power in order to fulfil their commitment to social justice and equality concerns. It is my hope that this thesis goes some way to promoting these too, and I concur with the following:

> 'The nexus of social work and critical feminist research helps academics to promote the centrality of a critical understanding of gender and difference in social work research and practice' (Wahab et al., 2012: 471).

This call for a more critical and wide-ranging approach in social work research is linked to concerns about the role of evidence-based practice (EBP). EBP is

generally accepted across the profession to reflect situations where professional judgements and decisions about services are based primarily on research that is robust, and generalizable, and the best available at the time (Taylor et al., 2015). The status given to EBP is increasing in some quarters, yet the feasibility of it for the profession remains contested (Heinsch et al., 2016). This focus as Reynaert et al., (2019) demonstrate is affecting social work across the work as neoliberal agendas emphasise quantitative outcomes, and risk pushing issues of human rights and social justice to the margins. This concern is not new, as Humphries, (2003:89) has also argued for the need to '…end the hegemony of positivist-inspired social science' in social work research. She challenged the emphasis given to EBP, arguing it is problematic and restricting as a result of the epistemological concepts it applies. In doing so she chimes with arguments made by feminist scholars, as this next section demonstrates.

3.6 Feminist Challenges to Positivism and Claims of Objectivity in the Research Process

Feminist critiques of positivism, the traditional research paradigm for scientific method, point to how the elevation of objectivity as the essential criterion by which knowledge claims are judged, is misplaced. Within a positivist paradigm, objective knowledge is unbiased and therefore represents truth. Positivism assumes a unified truth can be accessed via the testing out of hypotheses in an objective manner (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This means we can have confidence in it as a fact, as opposed to an opinion or personal preference. The value free researcher is seen as the person best placed to uncover facts and truths about the world, and lead to universal knowledge claims. In this view, knowledge is only that which can be confirmed, evidenced and is factual. It originates from the scientific revolution of rationalist and empiricist movements in Europe in the late 1800s (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014). The influence of this approach to natural science stretches to other areas of knowledge. Thus, positivism '…advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond' (Bryman, 2012: 714).

Feminist critiques of positivism developed as women researchers attempted to apply the principles of research design according to its framework and came unstuck. Ann Oakley exposed some of the contradictions inherent in trying to be objective when using interviewing as a research method. Oakley (1981) argued that it is absurd to expect an interviewer to be detached and dispassionate; it is objectifying to treat the interviewee as a passive responder to questions, with no expectation that s/he will ask any questions. This situation she argued was very unnatural, especially when interviewing women as a feminist, and wanting to validate women's experiences. She concluded that, rather than view personal involvement as a dangerous bias, it should be recognised as essential as it is '… the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.' (Oakley 1981: 58). Oakley's work is now a classic text in feminist research literature, and has contributed to shifts in social research practices that mean that positivistic claims to neutrality in social research are disingenuous:

> '…feminists exposed the dominance of the positivist paradigm as stemming not from its objectivity or its universality, but from its privileged location within a historical, material and social set of patriarchal power relations. In short, despite all claims to the contrary, knowledge building was never value-free, social reality was not static, and positivism or social scientific inquiry in general did not exist outside of the social world' (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007: 7).

Sandra Harding is a key critic of positivism's concept of objectivity; central to her standpoint epistemology is the claim that 'knowledge claims are always socially situated' (Harding, 1993:54). She recognises that such a contention may invite a threat from relativistic notions and argues this claim does not reflect a commitment to the view that all knowledge claims are equally good (Heikes, 2012). She argues that subjective judgments are littered throughout the research process, from start to finish, however self-reflection on one's values as a researcher is a means to practice strong objectivity (Harding, 1993). Harding does not reject objectivity, rather she asks for stronger standards, so that research accounts can be more objective (Hirsch and Olson, 1995). Harding (2014) argued that objectivity is a social construction, summoned into existence

to negate subjectivity's willful self. She claimed that by problematising objectivity she was offering a more honest position, one that leads to a different scientific identity. This different identity locates the researcher in social relationships and does not divorce her or him from their political, cultural, gender and other identities. Classical standards of objectivity were also criticised by Haraway (1988: 416) who referred to "god tricks" that promise '…vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully.' Haraway used the concept of situated knowledge to demonstrate that truths are always partial, and not separate from the lived experiences of those involved in the research process.

In terms of my own research and academic experiences I welcome feminist critiques of positivism. I was trained in quantitative research methods as an undergraduate on a Psychology degree course. The positivistic tradition to research was presented as the only route to knowledge and understanding of human experience; I did not question this as an undergraduate. Yet, as I have discussed in chapter 1, like many other women in Psychology (Burman, 1990), I was disillusioned and disappointed with much of orthodox academic psychology. More recently, Gavey writing about her experience in psychology, shares similar concerns to mine, as she describes her lack of satisfaction with a positivist paradigm because it:

> '… required stripping away the sort of messy detail that intrigued me. The research ended up chasing a caricature of the phenomenon in which I was interested – a kind of reductive empiricism that left me unsatisfied' (Gavey, 2011:183).

I wanted to avoid such feelings in this project and engaging with feminist research principles helped me do this. However, it is important to note as Hesse-Biber (2012, 2014) does, that positivism is not the antithesis of all feminist enquiry, positivism is seen to have merit in some feminist research circles. Feminist empiricists for example see positivistic frameworks as adding validity to a research project, it is the misapplication of positivism that is the concern, not positivism per se. Some feminist empiricists have been said to sit in a post-

positivism paradigm that values objectivity, despite its imperfections (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2010).

Feminists' criticisms of positivism resulted in a shift in perspective which reflects the beginning of an overall challenge to scientific method and supported the development of new paradigms of thinking about basic questions such as what truth is, who can know, and what can be known (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This challenge also came from other sources. Apple (1991) considers postmodernism to have also made a significant contribution to efforts to shatter the grand narratives or ultimate truths posed by positivism and declared positivism has been displaced as a consequence of this.

In their critique of positivism, feminists challenge the notion that researcher identify/subjectivity is irrelevant, and their work highlights the importance of acknowledging positionality in research contexts (Ryan–Flood and Gill, 2010). Writing frankly about research experiences (as I do in this thesis) enables feminists to own their subjectivity; one outcome of this is a concern for reflexivity in the research process. Reflexivity can act as a means to improve a study's objectivity (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

3.7 Reflexivity

In feminist research discussions, reflexivity is regarded as one of the pivotal themes and one of few points on which there is some consensus (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). Many characterisations of feminist research give it a central place (Stanley and Wise, 1983,1993; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Waller, 2005; Burns and Chantler, 2011; McCormick, 2013, and Hesse-Biber, 2014). Improving our own reflexivity as we progress research can support us to be a catalyst for social change (Bloom and Sawin, 2009).

Reflexivity is a process by which researchers can '…recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions can influence the research.' (Hesse-Biber, 2014:3). It involves the sharing of our '…presuppositions, choices, experiences and actions during the research

process in a sufficiently precise way' (Mruck and Breuer, 2003:192). Reflexivity comes in many guises and researchers employ it in a range of contexts. For Burman (2006:316) reflexivity in research is a reflection that the research and the researcher have refused

> '…the scientistic positioning of the neutral observer, to instead highlight and explore the nature of researcher involvement as a relevant resource – extending to the broader claim that objectivity is a specific (culturally masculine) form of subjectivity, rather than the absence of subjectivity.'

Reflexivity enables exploration of situated forms of knowledge and supports the view that theory is social activity (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). Reflexive practice can enable an exploration of silences in the research process, (Scharff, 2010; Gray et al., 2015). Critical reflexivity is part of feminist accountability and could be a means to manage and understand feelings of fraudulence (Beckman, 2014). It can support researchers to avoid faux feminism (McRobbie, 2009; hooks, 2013) or quasi feminism (Burman, 2006).

As a methodological tool, it has led to increased attention being paid to researcher subjectivity, as '…researchers consciously write themselves on to the text…' (Fonow and Cook, 2005:2219), and recognise how their subjectivities can become entangled with others' lives (Denzin, 1997). This is positive for some, but for others it is seen as tiresomely self-indulgent, and potentially undermining the goals of emancipatory research (Patai, 1994; Nencel, 2014). Certainly, it requires vigilance as its use may result in researchers slipping into self-indulgence. Burman (2006) advises researchers not to confine their work to their own subjectivities, but rather to do reflexive work in collaboration with others involved in the research endeavour. She argues that reflexivity should be used to challenge our own narrative positions as researchers, rather than as a means to explore our identities. Such use of it, she argues, enables a more rigorous form of reflexivity, one that can go some way to resisting neoliberalism's attempts to co-opt the strategy.

Poststructuralist thinking (such as that discussed in chapter 1) also challenges comfortable notions of reflexivity by raising important questions about the politics of representation in a research account (Lather 1993, 1995; Nencel, 2014). Further caution about reflexivity has been provided by Skeggs (2004) who points out that reflexivity represents a position of power and mobility; therefore, it is imbued with privilege, and as such is a classed practice. However, she also admits it could be used in a subversive way so may not always maintain inequalities. A possible remedy has been offered by Roddy and Dewar (2016) who discuss relational reflexivity, arguing for caring conversations as a means to create space for all involved in the research process to give voice to their thoughts and feelings. Nencel (2014) offers that it should be conceptualised as situated, arguing researchers should adapt their use of it to fit the nature and context of their project.

Reflexivity therefore necessitates a critical look at our research practices, and to avoid complacency, inequalities and misrepresentation we need also to be critical about reflexivity, or as Burman, (2006: 328) says, we need to '…keep notions of reflexivity on their toes.' Pillow (2003) refers to uncomfortable reflexivity as a means to achieve better data. She does not believe we should shrug off reflexivity, rather we should learn to live with its discomfort and messiness.

These discussions serve as helpful reminders to engage in a deep and critical way with reflexivity. Like Burman, Pillow and Skeggs, I see much value in engaging in reflexive practice in a research context. Indeed, use of the Listening Guide, my chosen method of data analysis, gives reflexivity a central place (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Gilligan, 2015; Woodcock, 2016). Reflexivity is very important to this thesis, not just for its feminist connections, but also for its links to professional practice in the so-called caring professions. Many social work authors promote the concept of the reflexive practitioner, a person with a high degree of self-awareness and criticality (Dominelli, 2009; Daley, 2010; D'Cruz and Jones, 2013; Sheppard, 2015; Whitaker and Reimer, 2017). Wendt and Boylan (2008) advocate the process of reflexivity as a means for social work researchers and practitioners to locate themselves in their practice to better understand the contexts shaping their interventions.

Reflexivity also has a central place in qualitative approaches to research (Lyons and Coyle, 2015; Morrison, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Such an approach supports the writing in of the researcher's positions and subjectivities, acknowledging that:

> '…the researcher is central to the sense that is made. A researcher's selected domain of interest here will be a particular aspect of action and experience…' (Banister et al., 1994: 2).

In the context of qualitative research, reflexivity has been described as a means to enhance research rigour (Delamont, 2004; Jootun et al., 2009), a way to increase trustworthiness (Finlay, 2002), and a route to achieving the emancipatory aims of studies applying critical paradigms (McCabe and Holmes, 2009). The qualitative approach was adopted for the research undertaken for this thesis, and the next section of this chapter further explores this research paradigm.

3.8 Qualitative Approaches to Research

A qualitative research paradigm enables a critical and/or interpretive approach to research (Hesse-Biber, 2016), and as I shaped this thesis, this was important to me. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offer a generic definition of this approach whilst also pointing out that any definition of qualitative research must work within the complex historical field that has provided different moments, shifts and debates, thus:

> 'Qualitative research is situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world more visible' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3).

A neat definition of what qualitative approaches are is not possible, they are '… not a unified set of techniques or philosophies…' rather they have '…grown out of a wide range of intellectual and disciplinary traditions.' (Mason 2002: 2). The landscape of qualitative methodologies is one of '… creative complexity …' where consensus is not as easily achieved as it is in the quantitative community (Tracy,

2010: 837). For some authors it is easier to identify what qualitative approaches are not, rather than what they are (D'Cruz and Jones, 2013).

Qualitative approaches are seen as counter to quantitative approaches, and as such typically challenge positivism (Hesse-Biber, 2016). The research strategy of qualitative researchers is inductivist, constructionist and interpretivist (Bryman, 2012). This means that subjective meanings created by social actors are valued, the embodied nature of knowledge is recognised, and theory is then developed from this. This position challenges notions of predetermined rules, laws and categories for human experience in the social world, adopting a social constructionist ontology and epistemology. The starting point for a social constructionist position claims:

> '... all knowledge is constructed and that social phenomena and social reality are created out of actions and interpretations of people during their social relations' (Orme and Shemmings, 2010:87).

Qualitative approaches are not necessarily emancipatory but can be adapted to permit an inquiry to pursue emancipatory goals (D'Cruz and Jones, 2013). There is much that links qualitative approaches with feminism, neither is a unified tradition. For me the two are closely linked as my first introduction to the qualitative paradigm was in the context of postgraduate study of what was termed at the time 'Feminist Psychology'. Here I learned that many of the goals of feminist research can be well served by adopting a qualitative approach.

3.9 Feminist Research and the Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative methodologies developed in opposition to quantitative approaches as feminists and other critical researchers wanted to disrupt traditional ways of conducting research and acquiring knowledge. For example, following critiques of positivism, many feminist psychologists turned to qualitative methods as a means to enable a more in-depth exploration of women's experiences, without imposing ill-fitting, pre-existing frameworks on their data (Bailey, 2012; Lyons and

Coyle, 2016). It was the study of some of this work that initially engaged me as a student of Psychology with the qualitative paradigm.

As feminist research developed many feminists showed a clear preference for qualitative approaches to research (Graham, 1983, Mies, 1983; Burman, 1990), as they were posited as a method that was more inherently in line with feminism and if adopted offered a more effective way to achieve more egalitarian relationships in research (Ryan-Flood, 2010). For many feminist researchers the qualitative paradigm's ability to be open-ended, in- depth, enable a holistic view of women, and recognise socio-political context makes it a valued approach to adopt (Gray et al., 2015; Rizvi, 2019).

The relationship between the qualitative paradigm and feminism is a symbiotic one. Feminist debates about what constitutes a feminist methodology aided the development of qualitative approaches as Mason (2002:3) when discussing qualitative researching identified:

> 'Feminism has indeed had an enormous impact in its challenge to conventional scientific discourse, and in establishing the agenda for a whole range of issues which are now seen as central to qualitative research.'

In a similar vein, Harvey (2013:89) offered; 'there is little doubt that contemporary qualitative research owes a great deal to feminism.' Additionally, feminism and the qualitative paradigm have had similar trajectories in terms of the challenges presented by post theories, and both have adapted in response to some of this challenge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, 2018).

The qualitative / quantitative divide that exercised feminist researchers in the past has somewhat dampened since the 1990s. Although Ann Oakley contended:

> '…both feminist methodology and feminist epistemology remain strongly founded on qualitative methods…to be a feminist social scientist one must have a certain allegiance to the qualitative paradigm' (Oakley, 1998:716).

She also argued for the rehabilitation of quantitative methodology, and concluded her paper with:

> ‘The construction of ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ methods as opposed impedes critical thinking about developing and using ways of knowing capable of respecting the autonomy and subjectivity of the researched, at the same time as minimising bias, in creating an appropriate knowledge for women’ (Oakley, 1998: 725).

Currently many feminists use quantitative and mixed methods in their work, (Marchbank and Letherby, 2006) and others acknowledge that quantitative methodologies can support feminist research aims (Sprague, 2005; Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Letherby (2004a, 2004b) advocates for diversity and variety in feminist research methods, pointing out feminist researchers should be guided by their research questions when choosing methodology not by a belief that the qualitative method is the only route for feminist research. Such a stance can be pragmatic and results in mixed methods studies. Westmarland (2001) argues against taking a dichotomous view when it comes to a qualitative or quantitative methodology, stating that what matters is how methods are used and applied from feminist perspectives. This vexed discussion perhaps reflects one of the many irreconcilable debates in feminism, what Butler (1993) called productive antagonism. Essentially what is important is that feminist researchers do not limit their opportunities to access knowledge in all its forms and manifestations.

Notwithstanding, the ambitions and aims for this project were not in a quantitative direction, the nature of the research questions meant a qualitative approach was deemed suitable due to its ability to:

> ‘…produce detailed and non-quantitative accounts of small groups, seeking to interpret the meanings people make of their lives in natural settings, on the assumption that social interactions form an integrated set of relationships best understood by inductive processes’ (Payne and Payne, 2004: 175).

In addition, it was significant for me that:

> ‘The qualitative research process is neither black and white nor straightforward. Instead, it thrives in the gray regions that are filled with nuance, detail, and richness. It is the process of unearthing these dynamic grey regions that are the most challenging and most rewarding’ (Petrovic, et al., 2015:10).

The social work/care context also compelled me to adopt a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research has an established place as a popular approach to social work research (Fortune et al., 2013; Padgett, 2016). According to Danso (2015) this approach to research excites interest in social work inquiry that often entails a corresponding interest in social justice. Of course, social work researchers may also undertake quantitative and mixed method research projects (McLaughlin, 2012). Indeed, the current focus on and concern with evidence-based practice in social work has led to more interest in the use of quantitative methods (Sheppard, 2016). Nevertheless, in this context the benefits that come with a qualitative approach better suited the research aims, the epistemological, and the political underpinnings of my project.

Qualitative research approaches lead to an engagement with ethics that is similar to, but also significantly different to the ethical practices of quantitative researchers. Brinkmann and Kvale (2008:8) argued that qualitative research is ‘…saturated with ethical issues…’ such that there is a stronger impetus on researchers to explore power in both its obvious and more concealed forms. Qualitative researchers often foreground ethical values that are in tension with existing and more dominant forms of research ethics (Hammersley and Traianou, 2014). I now explore the ethical considerations entailed in this study.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

> ‘Feminist methodology offers one of the most engaging and grounded ways of doing ethical research that is an active site for social transformation’ (Rizvi, 2019:46).

Many authors have identified that a concern with the ethical questions that guide a research project is a key aspect of feminist research (Maynard, 1994; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Guimares 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014). For Ackerly and True (2008) a feminist research ethic involves attentiveness to the power of knowledge, epistemology, boundaries, marginalisation, silences, power differentials in relationships and our situatedness as researchers. They also state that these reflect '… a commitment to inquiry about how we inquire' (Ackerly and True, 2008: 695), which is itself the feminist research ethic. Such inquiry has meant that feminist researchers have advanced many discussions of ethics that have now become standard practice in the ethical codes of professional bodies representing research in different disciplines (Glucksman, 2010; Miner et al., 2012).

It must be said that such a concern with ethics is fraught with dilemmas (Kirsch, 1999; McCormick, 2013; Rizvi, 2019). This study was no different. My feminism and the dual positions I had as teacher and researcher entailed a thorough examination of ethical research standards such as informed consent, justice, protection from harm, beneficence which Miner et al. (2012) argue are solid standards that promote the ethical treatment of participants. Much of this examination was aided by my engagement in critical reflexivity as discussed earlier, however it was a tense, and at times intense process.

Initially, engagement with the ethics of this project related to the procedural ethics mandated by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) as my employer and funder of the research. This required the completion of an Ethics Checklist and an Application for Ethical Approval, both of which received approval from the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee (blank copies of forms pertaining to this process are included in appendices 1 and 2). A copy of a memo confirming ethical approval is in appendix 3. The important ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and storage of data were addressed via these procedures. From this I developed a Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Forms (copies are available in appendix 4 and appendix 5).

Fuller engagement with ethics came as I sought students as participants. I requested via an email announcement volunteers to participate in the study; a copy is available in appendix 6. I targeted this to final year students on a BA Social Care undergraduate course who were interested in applying for postgraduate training in Social Work via a Masters programme. I did this on three occasions, so worked with three different cohorts of final year students. Students on this BA Social Care course are predominantly women, and many come from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities. The majority of students also come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in each cohort a significant number are identified as needing a personal learning plan (PLP). These PLPs are more often than not for specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and /or mixed anxiety and depression. Although their course has close links to Social Work, it does not provide a professional qualification in Social Work. In order to achieve social worker status, BA Social Care students must study for a postgraduate qualification. I wanted to support these postgraduate applicants as I had undertaken this support role informally in the past, at the request of students in previous cohorts. This work had resulted in many fruitful discussions about the role of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices in social work, and the need for candidates being interviewed for social work training to be fully informed and show insight in these areas of practice. I contended that my interest in engaging students with feminism as a critical lens to support personal development, teaching and learning and more effective social work/care practice could be served by offering a feminist space/classroom in which a small group of students could meet. In this space I could support students through the postgraduate application process, and they could be part of my research. I requested that they take part in four sessions initially, and was open to the possibility of this increasing, which it did, in response to student interest. My interest in offering them support through the application process in return for their participation in the research was prompted by a desire to practice reciprocity, in the hope it might lead to the more democratic, empowered research encounters feminists aspire to (Lather, 1991b), and expand the transformative potential of our collective efforts (Trainor and Bouchard, 2013).

The action research element of this project, which I discuss later, also entails giving explicit attention to reciprocal arrangements (Robertson, 2000). Lather (1986:263) defined reciprocity in the following way:

> 'Reciprocity implies give-and-take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. It operates at two primary points in emancipatory empirical research: the junctures between researcher and researched, and between data and theory'.

As well as reciprocity I also wanted to avoid engaging in an exploitative venture, and so heeded the following from Paradis (2000:840):

> 'Research is exploitative if the researcher's interests alone shape every step of the research process… and research resembles a colonial economy when researchers enter uninvited into the world of participants, extract a resource called data, process this resource into a product called theory, and use the product only for their own ends…'

In addition, concepts of consent as a process that runs throughout the research project also guided my practice in an effort to avoid exploitation of participants (Dewing, 2007). Consequently, in this context, I requested consent at every separate stage of data collection via use of the consent forms (see appendix 5). I avoided assuming that just because a participant had taken part in a focus group for example, this also meant they were consenting to a one to one interview or keeping a reflective diary. One consequence of this as mentioned earlier, was that not all participants provided all data requested. I am not suggesting that this necessarily resolves all issues connected to informed consent, but like Halse and Honey (2005) and O'Connell Davidson (2008) I believe by offering repeated opportunities to consent, one is providing participants with multiple opportunities to negotiate their involvement in the research. This can only be positive in terms of the aim for empowering research encounters.

In practice giving such a priority to informed consent at times felt as though my sensitivity to issues of consent and ethics contrasted with a much more relaxed view on the part of participants, I noted in my reflective diary the following:

> *I am handing out these forms, we each sign two and we each keep a copy, yet the students do this willingly without any questions, it is clear from their behaviour they are going to take part in any interviews I ask them to participate in. This I suppose is good, as it reflects their commitment, for which I am grateful, and humbled. However, I must make sure I do not take their participation for granted. I need to model good ethical practices, especially for their dissertations, but also because I am the feminist researcher and the teacher here* (GM Reflective Journal entry March 2015).

A particular focus for feminists is issues of power imbalances (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Letherby, 2003; Grenz, 2005). The shifting balance of power can be one dilemma that there is no universally valid solution to (Scharff 2010). Letherby (2003: 114) asserts:

> 'There is an assumption that the researcher is always in control of the research situation and is the one who holds the balance of power but it is often more complicated in reality.'

Relinquishing teacher authority and supporting student empowerment, in line with the feminist pedagogy discussed in my earlier chapter, were aims of the feminist space the students and I created. I will remind the reader here that I had to also be mindful that empowerment is a contested concept and requires careful examination, as it can easily be mobilised to give an illusion of equality (Ellsworth, 1989). In addition, power relationships in the research process are ever changing '…it becomes evident that there is not an either/or power relation between the researcher and the researched' (Grenz, 2005: 2111).

I had to accept that not all of the students would see the opportunity of the feminist space as useful, empowering, and attractive. This may have been for a

number of reasons; postfeminism may have been one reason. I have discussed this concept in previous chapters and return to it again in chapter 6 as it relates to some of the findings. Of the 30 students (this is the total over the three cohorts) who responded to the request to participate, and attended an initial meeting, only 14 engaged with the feminist classroom. Thirteen of these contributed some data, and of this number only 5 gave it a full commitment. By this I mean completed a reflective diary, took part in focus groups and individual interviews. Seven participated in a focus group only, and one other completed entries in a reflective journal but was unable to participate in any discussions. Focus groups, interviews and reflective journals were my research methods, and I explore my use of them later in this chapter. In terms of participants, I will not offer a pen portrait as some writers do, as I believe it will breach confidentiality, compromising anonymity. Should my colleagues read this thesis, I believe they will easily be able to identify the students who acted as participants in this study. I want to avoid this breach. When I discuss their contributions in subsequent chapters, I give each a pseudonym. Pseudonyms I chose are discussed in the next section of this chapter. However, I will report that the 13 who provided some data consisted of 12 women and 1 man, 11 were of Black and /or ethnic minority backgrounds, and 2 were white British. I was disappointed that I could not sustain the engagement of more of the 30 students who originally showed expressions of interest in the project. I tried to keep as many engaged with the project as possible, but at the same time was anxious about whether or not I was acting in a selfish, instrumental or exploitative manner, concepts that are at odds with feminist ideals. The following entry in my own reflective diary reflects my anxieties here:

> *As a researcher I want to work with willing participants, I do not want to cajole or coerce people to participate, however, I need participants. How many times should I request participation? When is it bordering on harassment? I also need to get this project moving, but am I excluding some people because they have not responded within the deadlines I created? As a teacher to this group, I know they are not always responsive to emails, they miss key information at times, I cannot assume silence on their part to mean a lack of interest. Their lives are complex and at times*

> *chaotic. Which role should take precedence? Teacher? Researcher? The two do not need to be mutually exclusive; I am a feminist researcher, and a feminist teacher. If I close the door on participation, I know some who will benefit will be excluded. Yet as a feminist it is important to give women's choices respect. Perhaps too I need to recognise their agency, at some point everyone who potentially could participate was invited, I cannot be responsible for decisions they make about emails that come into their inboxes* (GM Reflective Journal entry March 2015).

Although students had never explicitly said "No" I was mindful too of O'Connell Davidson's (2008:51) assertion and advice to accept and respect refusals:

> 'If researchers are working in a context that requires them to secure the consent of research participants, then they are expected to understand that 'No' definitely means 'No' if they meet with refusal.'

Consideration of the entangled nature of power and poststructuralist arguments about encouraging a more nuanced look at research issues such as participation, supported me to acknowledge that engaging with complexity requires '…sitting with uncertainty and unease' (Coddington, 2017:319). Equally relevant is Rizvi's (2019:56) reminder that; 'we must recognize that participants may not see the value of how our research is contributing to the wider picture.' Being prepared to engage with participants' priorities as much as those from our research perspectives can support feminist researchers to achieve feminist goals.

My approach was also guided by what could be termed an ethic of care and relationship (Gilligan, [1982] 1993; Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2003; Tronto, 1993, 2013; Preissle and Han, 2012). I have explored this concept in detail in chapter 6 as it is connected to the narrative of 'Care and Nurture' that I identified in my data. I am in support of Paradis (2000; 839) who asserted that:

> '…feminist research ethics must go beyond the avoidance of harm to an active investment in the well-being of marginalized individuals and communities.'

The concept of an ethics of care was developed by Gilligan ([1982] 1993) who presented a distinctive challenge to dominant theories of morality when she argued women's moral decision making was based on relationships rather than principles. Noddings (1984, 2002, 2003) endorsed some of these ideas arguing that all humans share a capacity for empathy. The ethic of care 'raises caring, nurturing and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships to the status of foundational moral importance' (Friedman, 1993:147). In addition, such an ethic '…focuses on attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance, and cultivating caring relations' (Held, 2006: 3 &4), and is endorsed in a growing body of literature (Cooper and Rogers, 2015).

However, some critics caution that claiming women are more caring reinforces stereotypes (Bartky, 1990), may lead to binaries and essentialism (Bowden, 1997), and an idea that women operate on a lower standard of decision making (Grimshaw, 1991). Others, such as Hammersley and Traianou (2014), are concerned that care as an ethical principle is problematic, as it may not always fit every research context; they state the primary ethical principle in their view is to produce sound knowledge.

While I acknowledge such concerns, in this research context I welcome the inclusion of care in ethical debates. Cultivating an ethic of care in a teaching and learning context requires pedagogical strategies that enable affective connections in order to develop empathy and sensitivity to the needs of those marginalised (Zembylas, 2010), in this project, and my teaching practice generally I aim for this outcome.

In practice, my application of an ethics of care led I believe to better relationships with and between participants (I discuss this in more detail in chapter 6). This meant that our engagement with each other extended beyond the research project. For example, they developed supportive friendships with one another, and I continued to support them as they advanced to and through their postgraduate study. This support included providing references for jobs and tenancy agreements, proof reading draft assignments, and on one occasion providing testimony for an academic appeals panel at another university.

Letherby (2003) has recognised that feminist epistemology necessitates a recognition that research involves responsibilities and commitments from respondents too, which mean that relationships do not end when the fieldwork does. This continued contact led to some further data collection opportunities, although this was not our intention as we continued to establish our relationships with each other. It also supported some opportunities for shared reflexivity as recommended by Burman (2006) and Roddy and Dewar (2016). On two occasions I was able to turn these opportunities into focus group meetings and collect some data from them. Using focus groups as a method of data collection is discussed in a later section of this chapter.

3.11 Designing the Project – Feminist Action Research

Feminists' use empowering research designs in order to '…contribute to consciousness raising and transformative social action' (Lather, 1991b: 72), and in this study I wanted to design a project that would support empowerment of all involved. I employed a feminist action research model and created an opportunity for participants to join me in a feminist space where we could explore concepts of oppression, discrimination in our own lives and those of service users. Feminism as a critical lens to support this understanding was central to our discussions. Action research is a means by which practitioners can investigate their own practice in order to develop and enhance it (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). Action research is:

> '…a means whereby research can become a systematic intervention, going beyond describing, analysing and theorizing social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform those practices' (Somekh, 2006:1).

It also enacts the following methodological principles according to Somekh (2006), which makes it a powerful way to intervene in practices:

1. Research and action are integrated.
2. A collaborative partnership of participants and researchers is developed.

3. A unique kind of knowledge and understanding is developed.
4. It begins with a vision of social transformation and aspires to greater social justice for all.
5. It involves a high level of reflexivity.
6. It involves an exploratory engagement with a wide range of existing knowledge drawn from different disciplines.
7. It engenders powerful learning for participants.
8. The inquiry is located in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts.

Participatory research or participatory action research are also terms often used interchangeably with action research, and to describe projects that seek to transform social inequalities (Bartlett and Burton, 2006; Kemmis, 2006, 2009; Brinton Lykes and Hershberg, 2012; Bleijenbergh, 2018). Such projects are increasingly necessary as a means to support teacher development, better meet the learning needs of students and influence policy decisions that affect the professional lives of teachers (Campbell, 2013; Bleijenbergh, 2018).

However, the value of teachers as researchers is challenged in some educational contexts, not everyone is supportive of teachers also being researchers, and many perils become evident as teachers aspire to combine teaching with research (Ellis and Loughland, 2016). Fortunately, as my context was a Higher Education Institution, being research active is a requirement of my job; this enabled me to employ an action research approach for this study. Action research has '…political, social, collaborative, situated, self-reflective, and risk-taking features.' (Simms, 2013:2), and when infused with feminism can be an effective means to challenge power and redress social injustices (Reid, 2004; Weiner, 2004; Frisby et al., 2009; Brinton Lykes and Hershberg, 2012). Feminist action research aims to democratise knowledge production, create partnerships and build community by drawing on feminist theories of oppression, domination power, and social justice to facilitate women's inclusion in all stages of the research process (Ponic et al., 2010). In this context this involved the action or intervention of establishing a feminist classroom. These sessions took place during the two-year period of autumn 2014 to autumn 2016.

This may be a useful juncture at which to clarify what I mean by ‘a feminist classroom’. It was not a physical space and did not happen in one arena. Rather it became all the interactions I had with the students who participated in the study. These interactions were sometimes semi-formal as we came together at my request and at other times informal and impromptu as we interacted at their request. Initially I asked participants to commit to four sessions of a maximum duration of two hours, as I did not want to overburden them, as stated earlier I targeted final year students for this study. Strategies we employed varied, initially there was some formality as I took a lead role, and later sessions were more casual. In early encounters, as part of the reciprocal arrangement set up whereby, I would support with their postgraduate applications to social work training, I had researched local courses, and was able to share my knowledge about what the universities they were applying to were looking for in their applicants. Additionally, I prepared materials that I believed would stimulate discussion about the place of social justice in social work practice and the structural oppressions we all face, but I was prepared to abandon them if participants chose a different focus in the meetings. For example, we looked at the poetry of Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou, and some of the ideas of bell hooks. As these writers have inspired me, I wanted to share their work with the students. Mindful of the need to avoid offering a narrative that suggests only Anglophone countries have developed this approach to equality debates, I introduced perspectives such as those of Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche. Adiche (2014) writes about how her feminism developed as she progressed through her teenage years in Nigeria. I also encouraged students to share their understanding of feminism as a global perspective; this resulted in students with African heritage relating stories from their childhood. This was important because it is necessary to avoid giving the impression that U.S. literature on feminism and feminist pedagogy is the dominant narrative, as work from many other countries has also contributed to debate, and enabled commonalities to be explored (Lawrence, 2016).

In addition to looking at some feminist writing, we also discussed meanings of concepts such as feminism, oppression, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices, and examined examples from their experiences, which could be used

to show insight into these concepts in an interview for a postgraduate social work programme. Stimulus material I had prepared in relation to this included the ideas of Lena Dominelli who has written about feminist social work, and anti-oppressive practices (Dominelli, 2002a, 2010). Ann Cudd's ideas about oppression and how to explain it also served as useful resources (Cudd, 2005, 2006), as did the work of Iris Marion Young on the five faces of oppression (Young [1990] 2005). After some initial silence, participants started to feel more comfortable and confident in the space and gradually moved to initiate and lead discussions. We agreed to meet more than the suggested 4 times, and each cohort attended further meetings.

An additional factor creating the initial silence and preventing them from taking more of a lead role may have been due to the dual roles I held as teacher and researcher. At the time of data collection for the first and second cohorts some of the students were also being taught and assessed by me as part of their degree course, (this was discussed as part of the university's ethical approval process), but I had held this assessor role too in the past with all of the others. I suppose despite my assurances that this project was independent of my teaching responsibilities it was inevitable that at least initially, they would still associate me with my teacher role, and look to me to lead, and perhaps also assume I had certain expectations, and based on these would make judgments on their performance.

When using an action research approach in education settings, the dual roles of teacher and researcher need careful attention (Hill Campbell, 2013) as teachers doing research work with students they teach as participants face '… a potential minefield' (Bradbury-Jones and Alcock, 2010:192). Given the blurring of insider and outsider roles entailed in action research, ethical practices become of paramount importance (Somekh, 2006). My engagement with feminist research ethics, as discussed earlier in this chapter, supported me to address and manage many of the tensions that could surface in this context. Additionally, my critical reflexivity stance, also discussed earlier, meant I could engage in the reflection and critical self-assessment of my motives and actions, such activity is integral to action research practices (Swantz, 1996; Bleijenbergh, 2018). As an example of

this I have shared some of my reflective journal entries in this report. With hindsight, I feel that I was oversensitive in my desire to meet high ethical standards, which I now believe, resulted in some of the limitations of the study. I discuss this more later in this chapter when I report on the methods used in the study.

From the three different cohorts of students that were invited to take part in the feminist classroom, one group of 6, one group of 5, and one of 3 emerged. The two bigger groups developed supportive arrangements with themselves and me, and as I said earlier, they committed more fully to the project. The first group of 6 came as an established group of 5 friends, plus one other; I explore the implications of this more in chapter 6. The third cohort was the smaller group, and they did not bond very well with one another, they preferred to engage with me on a one-to-one basis. I was disappointed by this but continued to work with them on an individual basis. With this cohort I also felt the neoliberal context we were working in to be much more evident. Again, I discuss this more in chapter 6. After a number of meetings with each cohort in the context of the feminist classroom, we arranged focus groups and interviews in order for me to collect some data. Additionally, I asked them to keep reflective journals detailing their views on their experiences in the feminist classroom; I also discuss this method of data collection later. As stated earlier, pseudonyms were chosen for all participants who provided me with data. Cohort one participants have been named as Nancy, Patricia, Sharlene, Cary, Lynn and Erica. Cohort two are named as Audre, Kimberle, Bell, Adrienne and Miriam. Cohort three I have named Lena and Rosalind.

3.12 Data Collection Methods - Focus Groups

Focus groups, interviews and reflective journals were the data collection methods used in this project. I attempted to employ each method in line with the key principles of feminist research outlined earlier in this chapter. Rather than repeat myself, in this next part of the chapter I keep my discussions on these methods brief and offer an overview of how I employed them.

Focus groups are '…a potentially potent tool for use in feminist research and feminist praxis' (Munday, 2014:236). An early advocate for focus groups in feminist research, Wilkinson (1998), argued they are a valuable feminist method as they provide opportunities to explore issues relevant to the person-in-context. Kook et al., (2019) note that their use amongst feminist researchers reflects the significance given to social context as they can allow for meaning and knowledge to be collectively constructed. Additionally, arising out of feminist critiques of traditional research methods, focus groups have been seen to be well attuned to feminist research concerns related to listening to women in a research context (Kook et al., 2019). Basically, they are small group discussions facilitated by a researcher and focussed on a particular topic (Tonkiss, 2004), and they capitalise on the communication between research participants (Kitzinger, 1995).

I conducted focus groups prior to the interviews as their benefits served to provide participants with a warm up opportunity that I hoped would facilitate conversations in the subsequent interviews. Over the course of this project I conducted 6 focus groups, each with a different arrangement of participants. Members of all 3 cohorts participated in focus groups. The topic of focus for all of them was reflecting on experiences in the feminist classroom. I used a semi-structured format for these meetings, and the schedule outlining the predetermined questions and areas of focus are presented in appendix 7. The meetings were conducted at mutually convenient times and their durations were between 40 and 120 minutes. I wanted to exploit the benefits of focus groups such as devolving power, reciprocity, obtaining interactive data and exploring social context (Wilkinson, 1998) so a semi structured approach was taken in each with a loose schedule provided for all participants. These schedules varied at times to reflect different stages of the project's timetable (see appendix 7 for copies of the schedules used). Providing a loose topic guide, and resisting directive questioning can facilitate the development of a more naturalistic conversational tone in focus groups (Munday, 2014). The focus groups were largely successful with participants leading the discussion, and they resulted in some positive bonding between some participants. I found support for the following from Wilkinson (1998: 115):

> ‘Researchers using focus groups in this way hope that through meeting together with others and sharing experience, and through realising group commonalities in what had previously been considered individual and personal problems, women will develop a clearer sense of the social and political processes through which their experiences are constructed - and perhaps also a desire to organise against them.’

The focus group discussions helped me to identify the nature of the relationships between the participants and how they built their own community. I discuss this aspect in more detail in chapter 6.

However, focus groups also bring challenges, as a moderator I was required to have some control, but had to also be aware that control and focus can easily be lost (Bryman, 2012). I wanted to avoid this, as I did not want to waste my time or their time, I think on balance I achieved this. The time-consuming nature of organising the focus groups and transcribing detailed discussions in which potentially more than one person may speak at a time are other challenges inherent in this method (Bryman, 2012). I faced these tensions too, but the flexibility and the potential of the method encouraged me to value its use. Further tensions I had to be mindful of in my use of this method relate to the feminist context, and the need to avoid the contradictions between feminist ideals and real research experiences. For example, I had to be aware that some participants may silence others, or that over disclosure may be promoted if the environment is seen as too safe. A concern I faced was that Cary, as the only male in the study, was silenced in the focus group he took part in. The group consisted of him and four African women, Cary is also African, and similar in age to the rest of the group, they were all mature students. I made attempts to draw him into the conversation, but due to his shy and retiring qualities, and the willingness of the women to share things, it was not an easy thing to do. Pinn (2002, 2005) has discussed tensions too, highlighting how anxiety provoking it can be for the researcher if participants seem to go off topic, or if the flow of conversation wanes. To avoid them in this project I sought to maintain an environment that was supportive, empowering and as collaborative as possible. My experience of using focus groups was similar to that of Kook et al., (2019) in that they

supported me to develop more sensitive and nuanced listening skills and appreciate more deeply silences and research dynamics. Using the Listening Guide as a method of data analysis, as discussed in the next chapter, also supported this outcome.

3.13 Data Collection Methods – Interviews

Interviewing is a valuable and popular research method in feminist research and is an attempt to uncover the subjugated knowledge of women that often lies hidden (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I conducted in depth interviews with only 5 of the 13 participants in this project. I consider this a limitation of the study. In relation the dual roles I have discussed above, I gave more weight to my teacher role over my researcher role, especially with cohort one. I conducted a focus group only with this cohort. This resulted in a discussion of almost two hours, and I felt that asking them to commit to individual interviews as well would be too onerous for them. By not doing this I have perhaps compromised my data. Pertinent here is the point I made above about Cary being silenced in the focus group. If I had been more assertive and researcher focussed with this cohort, I could have conducted an individual interview with him, from which I could have accessed more of his views and reflections. With cohort two I became more researcher focussed, and this combined with the exceptional enthusiasm they showed for the project meant that all 5 from this cohort participated in individual interviews. Additionally, all 5 provided reflective journals, and 3 of the focus groups involved all or some from this cohort.

For each interview I used an open ended semi-structured format after devising an interview schedule (see appendix 8 for a copy of predetermined questions and areas of focus). Feminist researchers often favour such an approach (De Vault and Gross, 2012). The interviews were conducted at mutually convenient times, and their durations were between 20 and 40 minutes. These meetings, as with the focus groups took place at the university building where they were studying, and I was based for my work. My experience of this method in this project supported some of the advantages the literature claims to be associated with this method when used in a qualitative paradigm. For example, they provided an

opportunity to get some insight into the participants' perspectives whilst also enabling the participants to direct the conversation according to their own wishes (Bryman, 2012). By operating reflexively and relationally I was able to conduct meaningful exchanges with each participant. I carefully attended to ideas about active listening (De Vault and Gross, 2012) in order to support my use of this method, and attempt to create knowledge for, rather than about the participants in the study. I was aware that:

> 'The researcher must stay on his or her toes and listen intently to what the interviewee has to say, for the researcher should be prepared to drop his or her agenda and follow the pace of the interview' (Hesse- Biber, 2014: 203)

Interviewing of course brings tensions, and my listening skills were tested, as were my abilities to manage silences without feeling I had to fill them. Some of the transcriptions revealed I had not always been so effective at listening, and as a consequence missed opportunities. After Oakley (1981) I tried to foster elements of self-disclosure, which included sharing personal information about my own relationship with feminism, its development and my experiences of oppression and disadvantage. I feel I was able to do this as I had established a good rapport and, in our work, together so far, we had already established a high degree of reciprocity. However, there were instances where I realised as I transcribed the interviews, that I had spoken more than I needed to. Reflection on this has led me to realise that by using semi-structured interviews I fell back on standard methodological practices in social research, and this was not the most appropriate approach for this work. I realised this as I turned to narrative as I applied the Listening Guide to the data (discussed in chapter 4) has prompted the realisation that narrative interviewing may have been a more productive method for this work. I explore this more in chapter 8 where I examine the limitations of this work.

3.14 Data Collection Methods - Reflective Journals

Participants were also asked to write a reflective journal that recorded their views as they experienced the feminist classroom. Reflective writing has been claimed to be a means by which a writer can develop critical thinking and analytical skills, and a method of qualitative research that warrants further acknowledgement as a useful methodological process (Jasper, 2005). Jacelon and Imperio (2005) discuss the use of diaries/journals by research participants, they refer to them as 'solicited diaries' and argue they can be a rich data source, they also point out they are distinguishable from unsolicited diaries because they are written with the research and the researcher in mind, consequently they reflect the interests of the researcher and are developed in the knowledge that the researcher will be reading and interpreting the contents.

When I suggested keeping a journal/diary, participants were unsure about this initially and required me to provide guidance. I provided a loose framework in which I suggested they could record the focus of each meeting in the feminist classroom, how their understanding of feminism, anti-oppressive, and anti-discriminatory perspectives were developing, how they were feeling in the feminist classroom, and how relationships with me and each other were developing. I also suggested they could reflect on whether or not they thought this learning was useful to their developing ideas about social work practice. I offered these suggestions with some concern, as I did not want to lead their reflections, but at the same time they were keen for guidance. I did not suggest a specific model of reflection although they were familiar with some models as they had engaged with them as part of their degree studies. For some their concern was that they initially perceived it as an assessed assignment. Here my dual role as teacher and researcher were overlapping once again. I too was keen for it not to be seen in this way and was also conscious that they had important assignments to write for other units on their course. I did not want to overburden them with more written activities, so this too influenced me when I provided a loose framework for this writing. As it turned out, the 7 reflective journals that were submitted to me were very brief; I accepted them even though they were not what I had anticipated. I had hoped that the details in them might guide the focus group and interview discussions in some ways; this was not to be the case. I shied away from encouraging all to submit one, and indeed asking those who

did to provide more detail when I saw how limited some of them were, again the teacher role overtaking the researcher role perhaps. In hindsight, I should have made more use of this, and used it in the way Burman (2006) advocated, as an opportunity to be more rigorous in my reflexivity and promote greater collaboration with participants. However, despite this disappointment, I was able to get some data from their journals and have included it as part of my discussions in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

I kept my own reflective journal all through the process, and like Nadin and Cassell, (2006) and Ortlipp (2008) I found doing so supported my reflexivity, as it enabled me to make my views on all aspects of the research transparent. My use of it also supported the following assertion:

> 'Keeping and using reflective research journals can make the messiness of the research process visible to the researcher who can then make it visible for those who read the research and thus avoid producing, reproducing, and circulating the discourse of research as a neat and linear process' (Ortlipp, 2008: 704).

I shared some of my journal with participants, as a reciprocal arrangement as they had shared their journals with me; such reciprocity can support empowerment of the researched as well as creating conditions that can support gaining rich data (Lather, 1991b). However, in this instance my sharing was not for data generation purposes. Another missed opportunity I fear, as it means I do not have data related to this that I can analyse and discuss.

Summary of the data collection phases.

Method	Number of participants who provided data	Cohort number
Interview	5	2
Focus group	6	1, 2, 3
Reflective journal	7	1, 2, 3

3.15 Transcribing the Focus Groups and Interviews

All focus group meetings and interviews were recorded on a voice recorder using an app on my mobile phone. I transcribed each exchange myself. Transcription is not the straightforward technical task it may at first appear (Bailey, 2008; Davidson, 2010). The critical lens required by feminist research should according to Tilley (2003) extend to transcription activities too. Therefore, when I engaged in this process, I was careful to avoid being selective, reductive and misrepresenting, so I transcribed word for word, noted pauses, hesitations, laughter and repetitions. In addition, I transcribed non-lexical utterances such as "erms", as these can help to preserve the context of the dialogue (Keeling and Fisher, 2012). I also used this as further opportunity for reflexive practice and made entries in my own reflective journal about the transcribing experience. This was a time-consuming process as Bryman (2012) notes, every hour of speech can take around five to six hours to transcribe. However, the benefit of transcribing it myself was that it enabled me to get very close to the data, which I knew would be beneficial at the analysis stage. At the time of transcribing I had not determined the method of analysis I was going to use; this admission is further support for claims that research is a messier and more tangled activity than many research reports might suggest (Letherby, 2003). However, I knew that I wanted to get as much data as possible from the exchanges in order to properly listen to the stories and experiences my participants were offering. Once I had decided on the Listening Guide as my method of data analysis my critical reflexive activities, mentioned above, became more beneficial. Reasons for this will be clear when I outline the data analysis procedures in the next chapter.

3.16 Chapter Conclusion

The research process undertaken for this thesis has been framed by feminist research principles, as I acknowledge that philosophical, epistemological and ontological stances held by a researcher are reflected in how they approach their study. All of these elements are tightly linked in feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist researchers adopt divergent perspectives to guide their research

ventures (Sharp and Weaver, 2015), their work is multi paradigmatic, and by no means a monolith (Lather, 1991b; Bailey, 2012), and the spaces they occupy throw up thorny issues as they address conceptual, methodological and political difficulties (Burman, 2012). While much diversity exists, feminist research is characterised by some key principles such as an explicit orientation towards change in social institutions, structures and cultures (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Waller, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2014) and a concern with reflexivity and the pervasive nature of gender which means that objectivity is also challenged and ethical concerns closely attended to (Landman, 2006; Bailey, 2012). Power and authority are also given special attention throughout the research process (including in writing and reading for the study) (Hesse-Biber, 2012), this is because feminists recognise research as political activity. Feminist research is not alone in tackling the many issues it tries to address, but it can offer a lens that is unique from other critical analyses. The extensive literature on feminist research guided me as I pursued this project through all its stages. I have attempted to give a transparent account of my processes here, including how I dealt with the complex and messy aspects, as Letherby (2003) suggests we should not present methodological accounts that deny the tangled reality of research.

My engagement with two key pillars of feminist research – reflexivity and ethics, are examined in this chapter. I have tried to engage with both of these in a thorough and critical way, and after Ackerly and True (2008) believe the depth of inquiry these two insist upon reflect an ethical approach in itself. It is important for feminist researchers to document their reflexive processes, being clear about why particular decisions were made at particular times (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). I have provided detail in this chapter that aims to meet this requirement.

The standards for feminist research as Sharp and Weaver (2015) note are high, and like them I find myself asking am I feminist enough? I do not have an answer to this, as I have indicated throughout this thesis, feminism and my engagement with it is an on-going project, a goal, and a place where goalposts keep changing. I am heartened that '…there is no singular or ideal type of feminist research.' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011: 684). Heeding the call of these authors who

requested more feminist scholarship. I hope therefore to have made a useful contribution here:

> '…to enrich our understandings and actions as we work to challenge sexist manifestations in our classrooms, boardrooms, institutions, systems, and scholarship' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011: 686).

The key contributions from Western feminist research after its establishment during the so called 'Second Wave' of feminism have been mainstreamed somewhat now, but initially their critiques of traditional ways of doing research and accessing knowledge were radical. In this reimagining of research, theory and methodology, feminists are joined by other critical, postmodern and poststructural theorists, who have also contributed to making some of feminism's research goals more common practice. While feminist research shares many aspects with other approaches, seeing '…gender as a basic organising principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives' (Lather, 1991b: 71) has meant it has '… produced a complex, compelling, and quite distinctive feminist discourse about research methods and the production of knowledge' (De Vault, 1993:77). Feminist standpoint theorists have made a significant contribution here and I find much appeal in their work.

The qualitative paradigm owes much to feminism, and many feminist researchers are inclined towards this approach, as I am in this study. Feminists of course do not limit themselves to just one approach, or indeed one method. I have employed focus groups, interviews and reflective journals in order to collect data for this project. Using these methods in a qualitative framework appealed because such an approach can '…celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them.' (Mason, 2002:1). I employed these methods as far as possible in accordance with feminist research principles, but experienced tensions that are inevitable in research exchanges. In this context the pressure I faced to complete this thesis and achieve a PhD, meant I was keen to get the data, and produce a suitable study, as a consequence I had to give priority to my own needs on a number of occasions.

A feminist action research approach is also evident in how I have conducted this study. In the creation of a feminist classroom/space in my teaching context, I worked with students as participants to support their understanding of how feminist perspective can inform social justice and human rights debates. We engaged with debates about these topics, and anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices and perspectives. As the students were aiming to progress to postgraduate training as social workers, such an opportunity also supported their ambitions for this outcome. The social work/care context is very important here and by engaging with feminism in a critical way as I do here, I hope to make a contribution to social work research. This contribution can be in the form of adding my voice to that of others who advocate feminist social work research (Gringeri et al., 2010; Wahab et al., 2012; Gray et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2018).

The data I have collected in this study was analysed using the detailed and layered listening afforded by the Listening Guide. This is an explicitly feminist method of data analysis; my use of it I felt was in keeping with the feminist focus I have been advocating throughout this study. How I employed this method of data analysis is outlined and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - Data Analysis – Using the Listening Guide

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter is a very close adjunct to the previous chapter in which the study's methodological choices and approaches were examined, justified and connected to my epistemological and ontological positions. Data analysis then follows on from these processes. However, analysing qualitative data in a competent matter can be tricky as a researcher can easily be overwhelmed by the data, as 'there is sometimes a fine line between being immersed in the data and drowning in it' (Seers, 2012:1). Qualitative data comes in many forms, and there are many ways in which to analyse it, Madill and Gough (2008) identified 32 different methods of analysing qualitative data, this may also have the potential to overwhelm. After some deliberation about which of the many methods available I should use, I decided to use the Listening Guide (LG) as a means to analyse my data.

For this thesis the data analysis choices I made were influenced by epistemology, as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) argue, data analysis is not a neutral activity, but as with other aspects of the research process it carries with it a researcher's ontological, epistemological and theoretical assumptions. According to Woodcock (2016: 1) 'as qualitative researchers, our identities are inevitably mixed into our methodological approaches…' The centrality of feminism to this thesis led me to look for methods of data analysis that would be consistent with both the study's purpose and the feminist methodology guiding the thesis. Consequently, as an '…explicitly feminist qualitative method…' (Lyons and Coyle, 2016:15), the LG became my choice as a suitable framework to use to conduct the analysis of my data.

This chapter therefore explores my use of the LG. The LG is a method for analysing qualitative data that gives priority to voice, relationships in research, and the role of silence in research encounters (Brown and Gilligan, 1993; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Petrovic et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2016). It is a distinctive and intensive approach to data analysis, and

for this reason, I felt that it warranted its own chapter, rather than my discussion of it be part of my methodology chapter. In addition, by writing about this aspect of my methodology separately as I have done here, I aimed to partially redress an issue others and I have encountered when it comes to data analysis, and that is the paucity of clear and explicit accounts of how the data analysis part of a study was conducted. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) for example, lament that while many aspects of qualitative research practices are well documented, data analysis is often neglected. These authors were writing about their own PhD work, and their efforts to achieve clarity when trying to make sense of the vast amount of data they had. Twenty years on from their writing, I too faced similar issues when it came to decide how to analyse my extensive data and transform respondents' contributions into accounts that did justice to their perspectives. My lack of experience in data analysis may have also accounted for my feeling that clarification about what to actually do with my data was missing, as Woodcock (2016) notes, new researchers often require more explicit how – to guides.

A final and powerful reason for a separate chapter on the LG relates to how my engagement with this guide transformed my approach to the study as it enabled key shifts in my perspectives from both a researcher and teacher point of view. As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) note, data analysis is a critical site for reflexivity, and this was certainly the case for me as I engaged with this method of data analysis. In this chapter as I discuss the method and my use of it, I explore the ways in which my understandings and positions changed as I adapted the LG to meet my project's needs and faced and resolved challenges as I progressed.

I also note that data analysis is not a separate aspect of the research process, and I am in agreement with those who recognise it is not a discrete process. My separating this discussion from my methodology chapter should not be seen as a suggestion that data analysis is a detached part of the whole process. I consider data analysis, due to the circular, cyclical and iterative nature of research, to be a continuous process, and concur with Mauthner and Doucet (1998: 125) who say '…it is an ongoing process which takes place throughout, and often extends beyond, the life of a research project.'

The first part of this chapter outlines what the LG is and includes a discussion about its origins and the ways it has subsequently been developed as researchers adapt it to their needs and respond to critiques of the original uses of the method. Each step of the method is then discussed; as I do this, I examine how I applied the steps to my own data. I include here quotes from participants in the study, and when doing so the participants are referred to by pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and respect the confidentiality of the data collection process. I use Interviewer (GM) when I quote myself.

4.2 The Listening Guide – what it is and its origins

Psychologist Carol Gilligan, in collaboration with colleagues developed the LG (Gilligan, [1982] 1993; Brown and Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan, 2015). Initially it was a response to the androcentric standpoint in psychological literature that led to an either/or binary logic in coding systems, which Gilligan and others saw as resulting in reifying and perpetuating cultural stereotypes. To counter this, they sought a means to analyse qualitative data:

> '… that was sensitive to the relational parameters of psychological research and to the cultural factors affecting what could be said, what remained unspoken, what could be heard and /or listened to and taken seriously' (Gilligan, 2015:70).

The LG therefore emerged as an alternative to address concerns evident in the 1980s, that women's voices were absent or had not been adequately heard in research studies (Gilligan et al., 2003; Petrovic et al., 2015). Gilligan argued that patriarchal cultures, theories and methods put pressure on women and girls to silence their voices to conform with gendered cultural norms, and the LG was designed to access these voices and experiences (Mauthner, 2019a, 2019b). Over time it has evolved to offer researchers a more narrative framework that can provide a deeper level of analysis of one's data (Jankowska, 2014), and create spaces to hear those who may be silenced (Woodcock, 2016). Supporting women to tell their stories and share their experiences using their own voices, and on their own terms, are integral to feminist research methodologies (Keeling

and van Wormer, 2012). Consequently, the LG serves as a useful tool in feminist research practices.

The LG is a voice centred relational method that requires multiple listenings or readings of the data (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Forrest et al., 2015; Gilligan 2015; Woodcock 2016). Brown and Gilligan (1993) argued that the embodied nature of voice makes it a useful site for analysis. They initially created a Listener's Guide as an acknowledgment that voice is fluid, ever changing, complex, polyphonic and unique. Carol Gilligan's attendance at an intensive training Shakespeare workshop for actors in 1990, engaged her more deeply with the properties of voices, and the dynamic of speaking, and listening, and prompted a name change for this method from 'reading guide' to listening guide (Gilligan, 2015: 70).

The emphasis the method gives to listening for different voices was and is for some an appealing element of the method. The focus on voice can be said to chime with the ambitions of researchers concerned that some voices, views and experiences go unheard (Mauthner, 2017). Consequently, some users of the method have given emphasis to the voice centred aspect of the method in how they refer to it (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, Fairtlough, 2007; Byrne et al., 2009; Jankowska, 2014). Indeed, in my early engagement with it when referring to the approach I was taking to analyse the data I asserted I was using the Voice Centred Relational method.

However, claims that this method is a means to give voice as part of a feminist project came under fire as part of the post debates referred to in earlier chapters of this thesis. It is a method that is deeply entangled with 'Second Wave' feminism and its attempts to make visible identities and realities that have been obscured and made inaccessible by patriarchal frameworks (Mauthner, 2019a, 2019b). Critics of 'Second Wave' feminism view this as reflecting essentialist tendencies as it assumes fixed and given entities. They argue the method cannot provide researchers with direct access to subjectivities, selves, experiences, identities and emotions when these elements are constituted linguistically, discursively, reflexively and rhetorically (Mauthner, 2017). In

response to this and the tension it created Mauthner and Doucet adapted the method (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner, 2017; 2019a, 2019b). Their adaptations did not disavow Brown and Gilligan's (1992) formulation, rather they built closely on them whilst also acknowledging the theoretical debates shaping research practice since the 1990s. Calling it the Listening Guide rather than the Voice Centred Relational Method seems to have evolved as result of these reformulations.

This guide was developed to provide researchers with '… a pathway into relationship rather than a fixed framework for interpretation' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993:15). It '…places emphasis on the psychological complexities of humans through attention to voice' (Woodcock, 2016:2). Giving a central place to voice, as this method does, enables exploration of an individual's narrative account and experience. Furthermore, recognising that these accounts are situated in wider networks of relationships and structures, and generated within a respondent – researcher relationship, gives it its relational element (Fairtlough, 2007).

The idea of a relational ontology, which is at the core of this method, enables the acknowledgment not just of who the speaker is but also who the listener is (Gilligan, [1982] 1993; Brown and Gilligan, 1993). It brings the listener into a '…responsive relationship with the person speaking…' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998:137). I was attracted to this aspect of it because I wanted to access participants' personal accounts and experiences, as I had developed a relationship with participants in the data collection phase I wanted to extend it in the analysis phase of the research. In addition, I was conscious that as most aspects of the methodology and design of the study were in my control (understandable due to the nature of PhD study), this method could redress this slightly and give more recognition to the participants' roles. I used it to help me avoid writing as a 'disembodied omniscient narrator claiming universal and atemporal general knowledge' (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005: 961).

The LG method requires at least four consecutive listenings of each narrative (Brown and Gilligan 1993; Petrovic et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2016). This repeated engagement with the narrative of each participant permits the researcher to

'…attend to the multi-layered communication of each informant' (Forrest et al., 2015:51). These multiple listenings mean it is a time-consuming process that will not suit all research studies. As I had a relatively small sample, it suited my data set.

When discussing the method, some authors refer to readings rather than listenings, or use both terms without differentiating (Fairtlough 2007; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Paliadelis and Cruickshank, 2008; Byrne et al., 2009; Edwards and Weller, 2012; Jankowska, 2014), and Doucet (2008) has argued that in the context of the LG, listenings and readings are interchangeable. She asserts that this is because when using the LG, one reads the interview transcripts as though one were in the interview settings, and therefore listening to the speakers. Woodcock (2016) goes a little further and recommends reading transcripts whilst listening to the audio recording at each discrete listening. Each listening/reading requires a different focus or '…listening in a different way' (Brown, 1998:3), and results in '…highlighting a particular aspect of understanding the interview and interviewee' (Edwards and Weller, 2012: 204).

4.3 The First Listening – listening to the plot - what's the story and how is it received?

The first listening requires one to '…listen to the story the person tells…writing out our responses to what we are hearing…' (Brown and Gilligan 1993: 15), effectively, listening for plot whilst noting one's own response (Petrovic et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2016). Doucet and Mauthner's (2008) adaptation of the guide described this step as a reflexive reading of narrative in order to trace central story lines whilst also reacting to the story. Many writers see this as similar to many other forms of qualitative analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Paliadelis and Cruickshank, 2008; Forrest et al., 2015; Gilligan, 2015).

As I progressed this first listening, and listened for plot in the data, I listened carefully to the context and content of the exchange in order to attend to what Gilligan (2015:71) calls '…the landscape of the interview'. I paid attention to what was being said about events, protagonists and key characters, in order to better

ascertain '…the who, what, where, when and why of the narrative' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993: 15). I looked for recurrent images, words or phrases, colour coding each one as others have advised (Doucet, 2008; Woodcock, 2016). In addition, I sought:

> '…central metaphors, emotional resonances, contradictions or inconsistencies in style, revisions and absences in the story, as well as shifts in the sound of the voice and in narrative position: the use of first-, second-or third-person narration' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993: 15).

As silence can be indicative of many things, Woodcock (2016) advises evidence of silence should be looked for too at this first listening. She argues that silence can manifest itself as a pause, trailing off of voices or a lowered voice. As I listened, I identified and highlighted all pauses on transcripts, occasions when something was said then left unfinished, and I reflected on the context in order to ascertain what they might mean.

By way of illustration of how I worked through this first listening, I have included below an extract from one of the focus groups, where participant Lena shared her frustration at being expected to do domestic chores, which the men in her household were not expected to do.

> Interviewer (GM)
>
> *Have our discussions about inequalities supported you to understand inequalities in your own life? Has it made you look at yourself?*
> [Pause]
>
> Interviewer (GM)
>
> *In anyway?*
>
> Lena

It has made me look at inequalities in my own life, because you know, erm like especially from a feminist side. I live in a house like with erm, my mum, my dad, everything, and like I would do the cleaning, the cooking, my mum also does it, and then like when it comes to my father or my brothers doing it, that's like another story. Like they won't do it, and erm I remember one day I must have said like "Why do the boys not do it?" and like my dad being, erm, saying he's an African man, he doesn't, like…, the woman is supposed to be cooking and cleaning. It's not like the man's job, but yeah, that's like inequality. We should all be the same, why is it the woman's role to cook and clean, and not the men's role? Do you know what I mean? They should be equal, it doesn't matter what sex you are, you should be able to cook, clean et cetera. So, it still makes me think about myself in my home. I, you know, my mum teaches me to cook and clean because she says that when you get your own home that's what you have to do, you have to be cleaning and cooking, cos that's what a girl is supposed to do, but who said that's what a girl is supposed to do?

Interviewer (GM)

Yeah, yeah, so why is that not attractive to you as an idea? There's a bit of domestic tension there, but why do you think it's unfair that your brothers don't have to have that level of involvement in activities in your house, or your dad…

Lena

Because it's like we're not equal like, why is it that other people get to do certain things and other people don't? You get to relax and sit down while I get to wash the plates, so in a way it's not fair, you know what I mean? It's just like, it's like you're still, to me it feels like you're discriminating when you think you can't do something, but you can't, so it's just like you've got… not more power, but you've got to do, you've got to do less than me.

In this small section, shifts in narrative position are obvious, Lena addresses her brothers who are not present when she says '*you get to relax and sit down while I get to wash the plates*', and '*so it's just like you've got, not more power, but you've got to do, you've got to do less than me*.' The brothers are initially absent from the story as she says, '*I live in a house like with erm, my mum, my dad, everything*'. The brothers who she later complains about, are reduced to '*and everything'* at first, and '*other people*' later. She recognises they have privileges, and at first is going to credit them with more power than her, but she checks herself, revises what she wants to say. Perhaps she does this because she does not want to admit to feeling or being powerless. She is resisting and defying this; this is evident in this extract. A fuller discussion on resistance and defiance will be developed later in chapter 7, as I have interpreted this narrative as apparent in many participants' stories.

In this extract Lena also asks questions, presumably to her parents, again who are not present, when she says; 'W*hy is it the woman's role to cook and clean, and not the men's role?* '*Why is it that other people get to do certain things and other people don't?' 'Who said that's what a girl is supposed to do?'* In articulating herself here, at times she uses 'I' and 'me' and at other times, although she is still referring to herself, she uses '*a girl'*, and '*other people'*. '*Cooking*' and '*cleaning*' are repeated a number of times, and I suspect reflected her feelings about these tasks. I attended to her silences, she uses 'erm' a number of times, and there are examples of her starting to say things then leaving them unfinished. I interpreted these to indicate she is giving herself thinking time. Of course, what I present here is my interpretation of the experiences shared, I recognise as Gilligan (1986: 328) did, 'data alone do not tell us anything, they do not speak, but are interpreted by people.'

Listening to the transcripts in this way, and to the level of detail required at this first listening, enabled me to more fully engage with the voices and stories of the participants. This engagement was further enhanced when I undertook the second part of this first listening, and I embarked on some reflexive writing as I recorded my response to what I was hearing. For Mauthner and Doucet (1998) the researcher's social emotional and intellectual locations in relation to

respondents can be made transparent by this recording of responses to informants' contributions. This attention to personal reflexivity serves to strengthen the validity of the method (Woodcock, 2016).

> 'A further assumption underlying this 'reader response' reading is that our intellectual and emotional reactions to other people constitute sources of knowledge; it is through these processes that we come to know other people' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998:130).

Returning to the extract given above as an example, when I located my thoughts and feelings in relation to the stories shared, I could distinguish my own voice from Lena's. This is an important aspect to the LG and supports researchers to avoid:

> '…projecting one's feelings and thoughts onto others, or in writing up the research, ventriloquizing or speaking through others, voicing over their voices, or using them to express what the researcher wants to say' (Gilligan, 2015: 71).

In response to Lena's comments above, I recorded a number of things. Firstly, I identified with Lena, as I too have brothers, and when we lived together as a family, my father also had very clear expectations of his daughters and sons, these were based on stereotypical ideas about gender roles too. My mother undertook all domestic chores, and when we became older, my sisters and I, but not my brothers, were expected to share in this work. I challenged this too and was dismayed by the injustice of it. I felt some empathy with Lena as I listened to her story.

For this element of the first listening, I followed the advice of previous researchers who suggest using:

> '…a worksheet technique … wherein the respondent's words are laid out in one column and the researcher's reactions and interpretations are laid out in an adjacent column' (Doucet, 2008:78).

This side-by-side approach can facilitate the possibility of another listener carrying out a similar task that can act as a comparison (Foster, 2013). Indeed, Byrne et al., (2009) discuss how this method has collaborative potential, which can be used to support participatory data interpretation and analysis, thereby democratising the research process. In order to exploit this potential and add depth here, I worked with a colleague (another PhD student also using the LG) on a sample of transcripts. She provided a response to the words of some of my participants, and I returned the favour with her transcripts. Of course, I hasten to add here that all transcripts shared were devoid of any identifiers, in order to maintain the anonymity of participants and respect confidentiality.

This collaboration highlighted to me '…people have more than one way to tell a story and see a situation through different lenses and in different lights' (Gilligan et al., 2003: 95). Calling on colleagues or friends in this way can widen what Doucet (2008: 79) called an 'interpretive community' and she noted too that working with others from varied social locations can support a researcher to make sense of areas of experience that are less familiar to them.

A further benefit I found was that another listener, who is not the researcher, is less invested, so can support the researcher to rethink their responses. For example, in response to the extract above, although I recognised what Lena's concerns were, I also felt a sense of disappointment and a little irritation at first when such domestic concerns were shared. Lena had not committed as fully to the project as others and had limited involvement in the feminist spaces we had created, and I felt not fully benefitted from the opportunity to more fully engage with what feminism is. I was disappointed by her lack of commitment, not just on my own behalf but there had been many occasions when meetings were planned, and her absence meant that they were cut short or felt less like collaboration. This affected the other participants too, one of whom who had attended every meeting, often found herself on her own with me because the other two members were not present. Reasons for not attending were always given. With this context, I initially felt that Lena's response above, indicated a belief that feminism is about household chores, so her lack of engagement, however justified, reflected narrow ideas about feminism. However, on reading

this transcript, my colleague responded to Lena in a more abstract and objective way and in so doing forced me to reconsider my views. My colleague's interpretation was to see value in Lena's story and recognise it as a useful example of a first listening. I was reminded of Byrne et al., (2009:69) who assert this part of the LG requires paying attention to 'who is listening?' This reflects that at the core of this method is the idea of a relational ontology; it enables the acknowledgment not just of who the speaker is but also who the listener is (Gilligan, [1982] 1993; Brown and Gilligan, 1993). The LG's attention to relational contexts and the narratives they produce prompted Riessman (2008) to describe it as an approach that is dialogic/performative. Such an approach reflects a story is coproduced, a listener/researcher has an active presence in the text, and it:

> 'requires close reading of contexts, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of narrative…[it] asks "who" an utterance may be directed to, "when" and "why," that is, for what purposes?' (Riessman, 2008:105).

This reader response element encourages the exercise of reflexivity (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998) and in this instance, I started to see more value in Lena's contribution, respect her story for what it was, and feel gratitude to her for attending the focus group. Her participation here surely indicated that she did value the project, despite not being able to commit as fully as others had. In addition, from this process, I started to consider the different ways in which I could position myself in the stories I might share as I construct an account of the research. The theoretical tensions around subjectivity in feminist research and theory are evident here and Doucet and Mauthner's (2008) concepts of narrated subjects are relevant. Through practising reflexivity in this way, I too '…began to conceptualise the listening stages as theory-laden and conceptual, rather than merely neutral and technical, practices' (Mauthner, 2017:77)

The reflexivity prompted by recording my responses to participants' stories in this way, and considering the views of a colleague, forced me to think more about my own listening skills. This I had already realised was necessary, as my transcriptions, to my dismay, had revealed that I had talked too much in the

interviews. My disappointment in this, combined with recording of my reactions supported me to review how I listen in a teaching context too. This was helpful to me and I hope to my students. I now aim to exploit this more as one of the strengths of this method, as:

> '…it brings the voices of all narrators to the fore, helping us to listen with full attention and care to what is said and not said' (Byrne et al., 2009: 76).

Listening for plots in this first step gave me clues to the events each participant wanted to share, as some participants shared data on more than one occasion; it was useful to look for plot across the data they had shared. In most instances, they told similar stories. For example, Miriam shared her reflective journal, took part in a one- to -one interview, and three focus groups, and in each she discussed how she used to feel that she had not faced much discrimination, as she recognised her privileges as a white and able-bodied person. Yet, after discussions in the feminist classroom she began to consider how gender prejudices had affected her and others, she had a growing realisation of the existence of sexism and its impact that promoted a new perspective on feminism. I discuss this aspect of her contribution in more detail in chapter 5.

I found this second element of this first step of listening to be an intriguing aspect of the process, and concur with Woodcock (2016: 4) who notes:

> 'These reactions and reflections are not simply noted and ignored; instead, these reactions are openly explored in the research process and used as prompts to promote thinking and analysis.'

4.4 The Second Listening – listening to who is talking

This second step has been described as '…a radical departure from other qualitative methods.' (Forrest et al., 2015:51), it is another example of how the LG method goes beyond other qualitative methods (Gilligan, 2015). The second time '…we listen for 'self'- for the voice of 'I' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993: 1). For Doucet and Mauthner (2008:406) it '…puts the narrator in the transcript at the

centre, at least for one heuristic moment.' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008: 406). The construction or creation of I - poems follows from this attention to 'I' (Petrovic et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2016). I-poems are created by taking each use of the word 'I' and its associated verb, or the text that accompanies it, out of the transcript in the sequence in which they occurred, and placing them on a separate line, to resemble how the lines of a poem appear (Edwards and Weller, 2012). Maintaining the sequence in which utterances occur in the text is important (Balan, 2005) but there is room too for what Edwards and Weller (2012) describe as an intuitive process, which permits the person analysing to judge the importance of what is being said. I found the flexibility offered by this idea useful and had to be judicious in some of my use of I-poems as there were examples where 'I' was used regularly, making I-poems hard to construct, as the following example indicates. Kimberle offered the following in her reflective journal:

> *When my relationship with my daughter's father broke down, I left a very comfortable life and found myself back in Manchester living on benefits. It was my choice. It had to be done. However, I was very poor for a while and I felt ashamed, I felt when I walked around town pushing my pram that people would be able to see how poor I was. I would literally walk with my head down, so no one could see my shame. I couldn't visit friends as I had no money to get to them, but I did*n't really want to. I was ashamed about the mess my life had become.

In this extract 'I' features regularly, so perhaps the whole piece is an I-poem, but when compared with how they are presented in other literature it does not seem like one. I found a number of examples similar to this in the data, in such examples the 'I' is not easily extracted from the comment in order to easily construct an I–poem.

However, I was able to create I-poems from the data, and I did so in order to support actively listening to how each participant presented themselves. I read each transcript and highlighted in colour all uses of 'I'. Then I followed the directions given above by Edwards and Weller (2012). For example, the

following text appeared in the context of a one to one interview with Adrienne. Adrienne had experienced some mental health challenges in the past as a young mother (she was 20 when she had her first child). She had received support from mental health services and shared some of this experience in the interview. At one point we discussed what she thought were the benefits of sharing this experience in the context of the feminist classroom, she offered:

'… it's helped me get closure that I wasn't mad and crazy, there was something else going on as well with me.

Interviewer (GM)

That's useful, as we do have a tendency to blame ourselves, so when we have this realisation, some people say the biggest benefit is letting themselves off the hook

Adrienne

Yeah that's how I feel.

Interviewer (GM)

And while it can be unpleasant to think actually this is wider than me, it can be reassuring that it isn't that I've misunderstood or got something wrong

Adrienne

Yeah, yeah

Interviewer (GM)

Or made mistakes, it is part of something that happens to lots of people

Adrienne

It's give me a belief in myself as well that I'm not who I got labelled. I'm actually me with thoughts and feelings that… This has made me know that they were, I was right to feel how I was feeling, cos I was being treated unfairly. So, it's made me feel better about myself.

The above extract gave rise to the following I-poem:

I wasn't mad and crazy
I feel
I'm not who I got labelled
I'm actually me with thoughts and feelings
I was right to feel how I was feeling
I was being treated unfairly.

Interpreting this I-poem I could hear a voice or narrative of resistance and defiance, and also a sense of awakening and transformation as Adrienne wakes up to understanding her past experience and challenges how she has been treated. Narratives of awakening and transformations and resistance and defiance are explored further in chapters 5 and 7. Further examples of the many I-poems created from the data are included in subsequent chapters as part of my discussion of the overarching narratives that surfaced as I composed an analysis after all the listenings required by my use of the LG were completed.

Attention to first person statements such as those above, support tracing how participants represent themselves in interviews (Edwards and Weller, 2012). This focus on how a respondent speaks about themselves is aimed to '…create a space between the interviewee's own self-perception and the analyst's perception of them' (Edwards and Weller 2012: 206). It is said to bring the researcher into a relationship with the participant '…in part by ensuring that the sound of her voice enters our psyche and in part by discovering how she speaks of herself before we speak of her' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993: 16). These authors

claim that this act is an attempt to know the participant on their own terms; however, such a claim can sit at the heart of some of the tensions in feminism:

> '…the issue of 'self' or 'voice' Is probably the most contentious one within this method of reading or listening, particularly in the midst of postmodern discussions of discursively constructed or fragmented selves' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998:139).

Tensions and debates exist in relation to determining how well we can know others and how knowable others are. In other words, what Doucet and Mauthner, (2008: 399) call '…the ontological and epistemological character of subjects and subjectivities.' Critics of giving voice projects challenge such projects for having inherent assumptions that '…subjects, voices, stories and experiences are simply there for the taking…' (Mauthner, 2017:75).

Edwards and Weller (2012) view Brown and Gilligan (1993) and Gilligan et al (2003) as showing a tendency towards essentialism claiming notions of 'I' can lead us to thinking of things that might be part of a person's make up, core, and stable, and that these can drive and influence them in any number of ways. However, these authors also recognise that 'I' is a particular form of speech, and can inform us about sense of self, even though these senses of self can continue or change over time. They add that often people will use you, me or we to talk about themselves, so suggest 'you' poems, me poems or we poems could serve a similarly enlightening purpose. Some researchers have created such poems as they adapt the method to their own needs (Woodcock, 2016).

In the context of these debates, I have found Doucet and Mauthner's (2008:405) claim that I-poems and the like can serve to 'trace narrated subjects', to be a helpful path out of this impasse. Mauthner (2017) argues that their adaptation of the method is underpinned by the assumption that they were not accessing subjects, voices, narratives and experiences, in their interpretive practices, rather they were shaping them. This she feels is consistent with Brown and Gilligan's original aim to reject notions of detached observers and recognise the researcher - researched relationship as constituting knowledge and narratives. Further

support for this perspective comes from Smith (2017: 180) who used the method in her research:

> '…not to emancipate true or authentic stories from the women participants but rather to explore the relationship between their individual stories and the narratives which frame, shape and influence the construction of those stories.'

Debate and tension aside, I found the experience of creating I-poems to be helpful in supporting me to focus on each participant's unique speech rhythms and choice of vocabulary as they spoke about themselves (Forrest et al., 2015). Constructing I-poems was an enjoyable part of the analysis; it helped to tune my researcher ear to the voices of participants (Gilligan, 2015). The flexibility of this method means that a researcher can modify their use of I-poems in order to expand analysis (Balan, 2005; Petrovic et al., 2015).

As with step 1 of the LG, here too I found it benefited my listening skills, skills that I can then translate to my practice as a teacher. Brigham (2012) suggests the LG can support better listening to voices from the margins, and Mauthner (2017) says it can support hearing from unheard or those whose voices have been devalued. Consequently, as the students I teach experience marginalisation on a number of fronts, the LG provides a useful resource for my work. In addition, the potential of I–poems to connect people can be harnessed by sharing them with research participants (Brigham, 2012). I was able to do this with one participant, and our discussion bore some fruitful insights for both of us.

Perhaps my small sample size facilitated the many positive benefits I achieved from constructing I-poems, as it has been noted that the time consuming nature of working with I-poems means that often a sub sample is used, resulting in the possibility that pertinent contributions from outside this sub sample are lost (Edwards and Weller, 2012).

Leaving aside the debate about how untenable or otherwise I-poems are, in terms of providing access to authentic truths or pure voices, I found applying the

technique to my own reflective journal illuminating. Below is an I-poem that I constructed after reading my own reflective journal. It is an entry in which I show concern that the third cohort to sign up to the feminist classroom lacked the enthusiasm of the first two cohorts. I find this puzzling, worrying and frustrating:

I-poem (GM 27/11/15)

I found their silence difficult
I was nervous
I talked too much
I will try to encourage them to bond more next time
I don't think they got the feminist ideas
I'm not sure they were comfortable
I wonder if they'll turn up next week.

Constructing my own I-poems such as the one above meant I reminded myself of the researcher role, and importance to listening to that voice too. Centrality of the researcher is important in qualitative and feminist research, this reflexivity, as I discussed in the previous chapter, is not a discrete aspect of the research process. The LG ensures we keep this reflexive mode at the data analysis stage. Reflexivity is just as important at this stage as it is at other stages of the process, yet at times this can be overlooked (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003) These authors stress that techniques used in data analysis are not neutral, they are imbued with our theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions as we are '…confronted with ourselves' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 123).

Using the LG on the reflective journals I had, was another adaptation I made to the use of the method in order for it to fit my purposes. The method has been predominantly used to analyse data in interview transcripts but can be applied to written accounts from participants as I have done here. Petrovic et al., (2015) also used it for written data. In addition, I employed this method on the transcripts from focus groups, so all my data was subject to the intense scrutiny of this method. When applying it to focus groups I separated out individual speakers and placed their contributions in sequence in a separate transcript, so I

could put their words through the LG's steps. I did this whilst also constantly bearing in mind the group context that prompted the sharing of experiences.

Mauthner and Doucet (1998:134) have described the first 2 listenings/readings as the 'staples' of the method, stating that researchers would always undertake these two steps. Themes are established at these two listenings, the colour coding from the first listening as plot is uncovered, leads to themes that are reviewed and consolidated by the voice poems at the second listening (Woodcock, 2016). Themes I identified as I engaged in the first two listenings, were centred around ideas of awakening as engagement with feminist perspectives and discussions about inequalities in the feminist classroom took place, stories of resistance as participants shared experiences of discrimination and responses to it, and a sense that the feminist classroom created a safe space where care and nurture were emphasised. These themes link to the aims of the research and, it is recommended that revisiting the research questions is necessary at these listenings in order to keep a clear focus (Woodcock, 2016). However, within the LG method, further steps can also be taken in order to enhance one's analysis.

4.5 Third and Fourth Listenings – listening to how relationships are talked about

Third and fourth listenings require a focus on how relationships are talked about as:

> '…we attend to the ways people talk about relationships-how they experience themselves in the relational landscape of human life' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993:16).

Many authors delineate these listenings as 2 separate steps (Fairtlough, 2007; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Paliadelis and Cruickshank, 2008; Byrne et al., 2009; Jankowska, 2014). For these authors, the third step requires a focus on how relationships are discussed and the consequences of these relationships, so looking to understand how participants narrate stories about their '…social

networks and close and intimate relations' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008: 406). While step 4 involves listening or reading in order to place people in their cultural, social and political structures and contexts, so the focus in on the '…structured power relations and dominant ideologies that frame narratives' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008: 406). I worked these two listenings in parallel as both focus on relationships; indeed, the presentation of them as separate steps is for ease of explanation, as in reality it can be hard to delineate them. In fact, it can be hard to delineate all steps as one gets experienced in the method. To illustrate this, I quote Lena again below, as her words can serve as a good example of how all listening steps so far discussed, can be apparent in one extract. A story/plot is present here, I-poems can be created, close relationships are discussed and their link to prescribed wider structural or societal relations are also evident below:

> *I live in a house like with erm, my mum, my dad, everything, and like I would do the cleaning, the cooking, my mum also does it, and then like when it comes to my father or my brothers doing it, that's like another story. Like they won't do it, and erm I remember one day I must have said like "Why do the boys not do it?" and like my dad being, erm, saying he's an African man, he doesn't, like…, the woman is supposed to be cooking and cleaning. It's not like the man's job, but yeah, that's like inequality.*

For my third listenings to each participant's narrative, I highlighted areas in the transcripts in which relationships were discussed. This activity identified that many relationships had been discussed, including those with partners, husbands, ex-husbands, children, parents, siblings, parents in law, tutors and teachers (current and past), peers on their course, members of their church congregation, employers/managers, work colleagues, service users, psychiatrists, social workers, and of course each other in the feminist classroom, and me as researcher and teacher.

As I listened to how these people were spoken about, I noted that both positive and negative experiences were shared. At these listenings, Brown and Gilligan, the method's originators, were interested in establishing the ways in which relationships could have enabling or constraining effects on self-expression in

girls and women (Mauthner, 2017). I too was interested in this; as I listened to participants discuss relationships in their lives. In particular, I was interested in how engagement with, and exposure to feminist ideas in our feminist classroom might have influenced their views on and understandings of these relationships, and their willingness to discuss relationships in their lives. The example below is from Adrienne who in a focus group talked in a very honest way about her relationship with her mother in law:

> Adrienne
>
> *I think these sessions helped me build a relationship more with my mother in law to be honest.*
>
> Interviewer (GM)
>
> *Right*
>
> Adrienne
>
> *Before these sessions I really hated her. [Others in the group laugh]. She was really horrible to me; she was sexist in herself, but then when I've done these lessons, I've realised, she's probably been oppressed all her life by her brothers, by her mum, by her stepdad and her own dad. So that's obviously, cos all she knows is to win for the other way that she's been treated. So, she treats other women like that. So, I have to understand that she's had 60 years of life, I've only had 20, so, what's been planted in her, she obviously believes it. You know what I mean? So, it makes me feel like, take it with a pinch of salt, I suppose. I feel a bit sorry for her, I suppose.*

Other participants discussed relationships in some detail, and the focus required for this listening supported me to identify the narrative of care and nurture in the data. I discuss this more in chapter 6.

Less positive relationships in participants' lives were highlighted as I progressed with the fourth listening, to look at wider networks of relationships. Adrienne in a 1 to 1 interview discussed how social and political structures impacted on her life during her time as a mental health service user. I have presented this in chapter 7 as her words relate to the narrative of resistance and defiance discussed in that chapter.

The fourth listening places people in their cultural contexts and considers the impact of social structures (Fairtlough, 2007; Jankowska 2014). Part of this involves listening for '…signs of self-silencing or capitulation to debilitating cultural norms and values…' (Brown and Gilligan, 1993:17). This element is very important to the context of this thesis, and I paid attention to how participants talked about gender, race, ethnicity, class and dis/ability. In practical terms I did this by highlighting parts of the transcripts when such discussion took place.

Participants shared experiences about relationships to wider social, cultural and structural elements of society that the fourth listening enabled me to uncover. For example, Kimberle discussed her work in a women's prison and how it changed her attitude to women who are convicted of committing crimes, and how the criminal justice system behaves. The feminist classroom was an opportunity to share and explore ideas about structural inequalities. Again, this links to one of the aims of the thesis, which was to support students to better understand social injustices. At this listening I attended to parts of their stories where injustices were discussed, these also included situations in which they felt they had been unfairly treated or discriminated against, as well as instances where they had observed or witnessed an injustice, such as examples from their work, or during their time as a student. Instances that relate to society in a wider sense were also discussed, for example some shared outrage after watching television documentaries, or accessing other media that revealed historic or current social injustices. Again, I identified the overarching narrative of awakening and transformations as I listened to the participants talk about relationships and place themselves in cultural and social structures.

This fourth step of the LG '…reflects a concern to link micro-level narratives with macro-level processes and structures.' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008:406). I was interested then to explore how this listening linked to the previous listenings, this required returning to the transcripts and looking at how the voices relate to one another. The following extract from Bell's reflective journal offers an example of how ideas from each listening overlapped.

> *'I undertook a level 3 advanced apprenticeship in IT and Telecoms. When I started the course, I was the only girl and was subject to many sexist remarks daily… one day things really got on top of me … my mam took it upon herself to play war with my teacher. He claimed he had no idea that this was going on and promised to have a word with the boys…The boys continued their behaviour, but I just kept my head up, studied, passed my exams, getting better grades than quite a few of the boys. At the end of the year I got offered a job there, but I declined and told them that I couldn't bear another few years sat behind a desk and surrounded by men competing to be the best. It felt good to leave and finally tell them how I felt. …If that happened now, I wouldn't think twice about sticking up for myself.'*

The plot here relates to harassment or bullying in a work situation, as Bell shares her experience of discrimination. The I–poem (underlined sections) reflect her resistance to this and final escape, but she feels victorious as she was able to reject the offer of employment. Her mother tries to rescue her and intercedes on her behalf, but the sexist cultural norms and structures of the workplace were hard to challenge. Relying on her mother to resolve things contrasts with her later confidence to exhibit her own agency and resolve things herself. Finally, in terms of the theme of resistance, she showed resilience and recognises that she has confidence at this stage of her life to deal with it and sees it as about sticking up for herself. A sense of pride that she showed such agency can be read into this, other participants showed a similar sense of pride as they shared stories of resistance. Chapter 7 explores this in more detail.

4.6 Fifth Listening - listening for contrapuntal voices

For some authors, listening for contrapuntal voices is another step in the LG. For Gilligan et al., (2003:159) it is further recognition that voice is not monotonic, so a series of listenings are required as '…simultaneous voices are co-occurring,' there is interplay and counterpoint (Gilligan, 2015). Gilligan (2015) states this listening happens after completing I-poems, as does Balan (2005), Forrest et al., (2015) and Petrovic et al., (2015). In contrast, Edwards and Weller (2012:205) view this as something that can arise during the construction of I-poems, claiming attention to this helps '…to identify the different subjectivities from which the participant speaks', and tracks '…ebbs and flows of change and continuity across the course of one interview.'

For Woodcock (2016:6) '… the third and fourth listenings are a way to further examine the voices and how they relate to one another.' In her guide to using the method, the relationship focus suggested by others at these listenings is given less emphasis. She describes these listenings as contrapuntal and suggests this could be another avenue for the creation of voice poems. Voice poems can be created at this step to help to '… explore the ways themes either melodiously interact or are in tension with one another' (Woodcock, 2016:6). Mauthner (2017,2019a, 2019b) does not emphasise listening for contrapuntal voices in her explanations of the method. This no doubt reflects her recognition of the tensions created round use of 'voice' as an indicator of self rather than as a construct to shape experiences, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

This difference amongst authors who use the LG can add an element of confusion to the use of the method, especially for a first-time user. It took me some time to work out how to deal with the differing views. Initially my response was to long for a more prescriptive approach and regret that this was just a guide as I was overwhelmed at times by the different interpretations of it in the literature. Ultimately, I was heartened to learn that '…many researchers…have created different ways of approaching the LG' (Woodcock, 2016 :1). I began to see these differences as indicative of the flexibility of the approach, which added further appeal to the method. It was not designed as a fixed set of procedures, it

was developed as a listening guide, therefore it is a method that can be adapted and customised to individual research projects (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008; Byrne et al., 2009; Koelsch, 2012; Petrovic et al., 2015). After all, Brown and Gilligan (1993) devised it as a pathway into data.

I used this as a fifth step and revisited the data to listen and read once more, this time paying attention to different voices occurring in the transcript. Having identified such voices, the next stage is to listen to the interview looking for markers or evidence of this voice, annotating and colouring the text as necessary (Forrest et al., 2015). I used coloured pens to code each distinctive voice. Balan (2005), Gilligan (2015) and Woodcock (2016) state that these later listenings enable the researcher to revisit the research questions,

> '…the researcher's question becomes the rudder in steering the researcher toward the voices in the text that speak to his or her inquiry' (Gilligan, 2015: 72).

Linking back to the research aims, and building on the previous listenings, I tracked some distinct voices. I traced an awakened voice, as participants became awake to experiences of discrimination, both their own and that of others. For example, Kimberle in a focus group says:

> *I thought I had an understanding of inequalities and discrimination and oppression, but in reality, I didn't, it was, it was just a word.*

Adrienne in her reflective journal recorded some of her key learning from our exchanges and wrote:

> *I also learnt that feminism is a great way for women to challenge oppression.*

There is a sense of empowerment and transformation evident in these expressions, and this awakened voice is discussed in more detail in chapter 5. A voice that acknowledged the care, support and nurture of the feminist classroom

was also tracked as I engaged in this listening. This is more fully explored in chapter 6. Additionally, a distinct voice of resistance and defiance was also evident at this listening. Participants shared stories of how they had challenged what they perceived as injustice, in some cases this challenge was direct as they confronted people, in others it was less direct, but they had challenged it in how they thought about it. Chapter 7 offers more analysis of this narrative.

This step in the LG requires paying attention to the poly vocal nature of participants' voices by focussing on one voice at a time so it:

> '… allows for the possibility that one statement may contain multiple meanings…and also allows the researcher to begin to see and hear the relationship between the first person voice and the contrapuntal voices' (Gilligan et al., 2003: 165).

It relates to the idea that two different themes can sit side by side, be present in the same articulation or overlap. Although I interpreted stories in terms of 3 overarching narratives (each discussed separately in the subsequent 3 chapters), the narratives are connected, and a number of participants' singular expressions can reflect more than one of these three narratives. Woodcock, (2016:6) expounds on the value of this:

> 'When thoroughly examined, contrapuntal listenings can potentially unveil vital understandings, illustrating how the themes interlace into an elaborate measure of insight. Contrapuntal listening exemplifies the relational nature of the method because it directly lends itself to uncovering the relationships to be found in the informants' stories.'

I did not use this step to create more voice poems, as Woodcock (2016) suggests, instead I re-examined my transcripts paying attention to where colour coded ideas and comments on my transcripts overlapped, and I moved to try to compose an analysis. By this stage, my use of the LG and my working through the various ways that authors configure it had moved me firmly in the direction of Doucet and Mauthner's (1998, 2003) adaptations, and Mauthner's (2017, 2019a,

2019b) argument that the researcher is interpreting rather than accessing or uncovering realities. This was part of my turn to narrative which I discuss later in this chapter and in more depth in chapter 8.

The various listenings of the LG are not intended to stand-alone, they are to be pulled together to provide a composite picture (Gilligan et al., 2003). Such that:

> 'The final step in the Listening Guide method involves assembling the evidence from the preceding steps to form an analysis in relation to the research question' (Forrest et al., 2015: 52).

Taking this advice, I therefore returned to my aims which were to support students to better understand social injustices and structural inequalities, support students to engage with feminism as a critical perspective that can support effective practice in social work and social care contexts, explore the values of feminist pedagogy in this context, and add my voice to support the development of feminist perspectives. From my use of the LG I had a deep engagement with my data; I had scripts of many colours and with many annotations. As each step of the method built on the previous steps, I had identified in my data the themes or narratives of 'Awakenings and Transformations', 'Care and Nurture', and 'Resistance and Defiance'. I therefore decided that these themes or narratives would be used to compose an analysis, as these were common or shared themes that emerged as each narrative was analysed and compared across participants, which Forrest et al., (2015) advise.

Arriving at these themes was not as straightforward as my comments above may suggest. Analysing qualitative data is a time consuming and cumbersome activity, where finding a path through one's data is not always easy and can be baffling (Bryman, 2012). I was acutely aware that there are parameters to this thesis, and I needed to make sense of my complex data set in order to fit these parameters. Ultimately, I needed to produce a coherent report, and when incoherence is the overriding sense one has of one's project this can be difficult. I have discussed in chapter 3 the messiness of research, as I was conscious of this too at the design and implementation stages of the project. I wanted to avoid

misrepresenting the processes in my account, as Letherby (2003) and Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010) note, many textbooks and journal articles sanitise methodological accounts, resulting in a silencing of key aspects of the process.

In addition, I worried that my desire to find order so that I could confine ideas to neat chapters and ensure I meet the word count limits for the thesis might mean I interpret things according to my needs. Using the LG goes some way to avoiding data analysis being used to confirm what researchers already know (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998), however, its lengthy and detailed focus on the data, results in many interpretations and reflexive notes. Making sense of such heterogeneous data has been a challenge faced by others too (Petrovic et al., 2015), and Jankowska (2014) found existing literature to be silent when it came to drawing the listenings/readings together. This dilemma is part of the lot of a qualitative researcher, and the lack of prescriptive guides can mean that '…qualitative analysis is the least understood and most complex of all aspects of conducting qualitative research' (Lichtman, 2013: 262).

I found it hard to balance my need to condense my data in order to produce chapters with my desire to avoid loss of valuable detail. Having enjoyed the benefit of the LG in terms of it allowing me to see the depth and complexity in my data I now had to find a way to bring out commonalities from my data, essentially to take the reductionist approach the method claims to avoid. Other authors facing this challenge have turned to thematic analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Jankowska, 2014) as a way to give coherency to the data. These writers point out that inevitably some data is lost with this process, however, as reflexivity will play a central role as themes and subthemes are identified in the data, this will ensure that the coding or aggregating of themes is less likely to be in terms of fitting participants into pre-existing sets of categories. Despite recognising that this could be a valuable process, I was unwilling to embark on another method of analysis, not least because of the time already spent using the LG.

I found some resolution as I immersed myself in my data and the literature about the LG method, and started to explore more about narratives. Many researchers have used the LG as a route into exploring '…the subjective and relational nature

of stories and storytelling' (Woodiwiss et al., 2017:2). My own 'narrative turn' (Woodiwiss et al., 2017:7) came about as I engaged with literature about narratives, and I started to think about how I had stories.

> 'Telling stories of all kinds is the major way that human beings have endeavoured to make sense of themselves and their social world' (Pateman, 1988:1).

This coincided with my thinking more deeply about Doucet and Mauthner's (2008) idea that participants' accounts are those of narrated subjects, thus the stories they have shared with me may differ from those they share in other contexts. The stories they shared were framed by narratives they produced in the context of my research to provide them '…with identities and allow them to speak about who *they believe they are*' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008: 406). After Orner (1992) I resisted presuming that the notions of identity they shared were singular, authentic and stable. With this context, I am therefore making a temporal claim about my data, not a conceptual claim (Ackerly and True, 2010a). My use of the LG enabled me to access the dimensions of the narrated subject. Of course, there is a concern with this too as Woodiwiss (2017) notes, the challenge is to value what participants say, and respect what they are saying is true for them whilst also asking questions about the stories shared, such as how and why they are told. One has to balance the danger of being accused of silencing participants, denying their realties, perhaps even siding with abusers and oppressors, with the need to be critical and questioning.

Engaging with the concept of narrative frameworks, I started to organise my data into narrative arcs or overarching narratives. A narrative cannot be defined in a clear and simple way to cover all applications (Riessman, 2008), and it is reproduced, diversified, negotiated and contested in the process of storytelling (Lockwood, et al., 2019). Consequently, it can be viewed as a narrator's attempt to link events in time and meaning rather than present a list of happenings (Anderson and Kirkpatrick 2016). To balance my need for clear chapters in the thesis with a desire to incorporate as much of the participants' words as possible, maintain differences between respondents and respect their individual

contributions, I focussed on three overarching narratives I had identified in the data. The intensive work already done with each participant's contribution sensitised me to certain issues evident in the data. I labelled these 'Awakenings and Transformations', 'Care and Nurture' and Resistance, and Defiance'. As I have already indicated throughout this chapter, I used each of these narratives to frame my findings and therefore subsequent chapters 5, 6, and 7 will examine each of these in turn.

4.7 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have expounded on the approach taken to analyse my data. I employed the listening guide (LG) as I deemed it to fit with many of my needs in this research context. As a qualitative method rooted in feminism (Woodcock, 2016) it connects with the epistemological and ontological leanings evident in my methodology and method. Its use by a number of other authors, who also apply it in a learning context, supports its relevance to my context (Jankowska, 2014; Petrovic et al., 2015; Woodcock, 2015). As Woodcock (2016) argues it can promote educational democracy as, it is:

> '…well suited to many educational research questions because the LG provides spaces for the voices of those populations that have traditionally been silenced.'

In addition, Fairtlough (2007) argued that such a framework could be particularly useful for research that looks at the emotional aspects of learning within a relational and structural context for learners who have non-traditional backgrounds. Therefore, I believed it fitted well with my research focus of exploring the value of feminist perspectives with social work and social care students, by creating a feminist space to listen to students' experiences. The depth required by using the LG ensures a researcher really engages with participants' stories and appreciates the significance of the experiences shared. This is helpful for relationship building, which is key to teaching and to social work practice, two key components of this thesis.

A further benefit of employing a narrative approach to data analysis, such as that offered by the LG, lies in how such an approach aligns with the Feminist Action Research element of the project. McNiff (2007: 308) made an explicit link between narrative inquiry and action research, arguing such research:

> 'enables practitioner researchers to tell their stories of how they have taken action to improve their situations by improving their learning. They explain how reflecting on their action can lead to new learning which can inform future learning and action.'

Their interconnections were also discussed by Pushor and Clandinin (2009) who argued conceiving narrative inquiry as a means by which action and change can be made explicit supports others towards their own possibilities for action and change. In accord with this, Toledano and Anderson (2017:1) claimed 'narrative is an important tool for developing and writing up action research experiences.' There are ontological and epistemological assumptions uniting feminism, narrative work and action research which make alignment possible and potentially powerful in and for research practices. Reflexivity, emphasis on the importance of relationship and cooperation, and beliefs about how knowledge is created, co-created and recreated in research encounters are some of the features supporting a coalition of these genres.

As a narrative approach the LG is a powerful way to gain access to and understanding of marginalised and understudied experiences (Gilligan, 2015). Its requirement of multiple listenings and /or readings of data enable each informant's multi-layered communication to be attended to (Forrest et al., 2015). This intensive engagement with the data may not fit all research projects, but the relatively small number of participants in this study facilitated the use of such a time-consuming method of analysis.

In my application of the method, I have heeded advice from many authors who have used the method, but taking their work as a guide, I developed my own way of using it, which merged aspects from the differing interpretations to fit my needs. As Doucet (2008: 78) says '…methods are not recipes that can be

applied in uniform ways across projects.' As I progressed my implementation of the method, I moved from describing it as a Voice Centre Relational Method (Brown and Gilligan, 1992,1993) to the version proposed by Doucet and Mauthner (1998, 2003) and Mauthner (2017). Their adaptations honour the work of its originators, whilst adapting the method for sociological contexts, and recognising that methods are not neutral technical matters but constituted through historical and cultural lenses.

Applying this method to my data was challenging at times, but I found ways through, and strategies to resolve the tensions. I have discussed these tensions in the chapter and hope in doing so I have offered a sense that research experience is 'not simply …recipes for action, or…warnings or advice, but also… a rich folkloric tradition in their own right.' (Warren, 1988: 64). To add to this tradition, I have therefore set my experiences of data analysis out here in a separate chapter. The detail I provided here gives transparency to my processes. Transparency about all aspects of your research process can lead to what Lorraine Code called 'responsible knowledge' (Code, 1988:187-188). Such transparency is often lacking in research accounts:

> 'Data analysis is our most vulnerable spot. It is the area of our research where we are most open to criticism. Writing about data analysis is exposing ourselves to scrutiny. Perhaps it is for these reasons that data analysis fails to receive the attention and detail it deserves' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998:124).

Doubts about whether after using the LG I have analysed in the 'right way' still persist. According to Holloway and Jefferson (2013), this is a core concern when it comes to qualitative data analysis. Part of my concern is prompted by how hard I found it to navigate differing accounts of how to use the LG, and the absence of opportunities to discuss my use of the method with others more experienced at applying it in their work. For example, although I found the requirement some authors make to look for contrapuntal voices in my data hard to manage, I attempted this, and it provided an opportunity to shift the focus as I revisited the data. However, I have concerns about how well I worked with this element of the

LG. Despite such issues, I believe I have offered insight into my area of study through my approach to analysis. The depth required by this method means that much of the data has been used. Inevitably, some has been lost as I respond to the constraints of the thesis, and I shared my concerns related to this in this chapter. Much can get lost in data analysis, and as Mauthner and Doucet (1998) say the best we can do is trace what we have done so other interested parties can see what has been lost and what gained.

The effect of the various listenings as I worked through the steps of the LG was to vitalise and revitalise each participant's story, and each listening brought each participant back to me, and in so doing their individuality and unique interpretations of their experiences were evident. I endeavoured to retain this sense of their individuality as I explored in subsequent chapters the overarching narratives identified in the data. Each narrative has been explored in relation to the stories shared by the participants. The narratives presented in the subsequent 3 chapters are my constructions, based on my definition of a narrative as a framework for the stories and experience participants shared. I did not want to deny any voices or disembody them, and although this was not my intention, it was hard to avoid this within the parameters in which I worked for this thesis. It was necessary for me to fragment the data, however, after Holloway and Jefferson (2013) I still wanted to keep a sense of the data's wholeness wherever possible. These authors stress the importance of keeping a sense of the wholeness in mind when working with qualitative data, arguing that it can be easy to overlook the form of one's data as one gives in to the urge to code the mass of unstructured data a qualitative researcher finds they have.

A further point worth making at this juncture is that as a researcher with access to the transcripts I am determining what stories I present here, it is not my intention to validate some experiences over others, but practically this will happen. Like other feminist researchers I find I:

> '…can only try to explain the grounds on which selective interpretations have been made by making explicit the process of decision making which

> produces the interpretation, and the logic of method on which these decisions are made' (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994: 133).

I endeavour to avoid what Orner (1992) would see as enacting oppression by selecting some contributions over others, therefore in my subsequent chapters, I work towards including inputs from all of the participants. However, as some participants shared much more than others in the focus groups, interviews, and reflective journals, inevitably they will feature more regularly in the subsequent chapters. For example, chapter 6 discusses the narrative of care and nurture which was much more prevalent in the contributions of one of the three cohorts, hence this chapter is dominated by their words.

Chapter 5 - Awakenings and Transformations

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The multiple listenings, and the different foci enabled by each listening as I employed the Listening Guide (LG) as a method of data analysis (Brown and Gilligan, 1993; Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Woodcock, 2016) generated many stories, opinions, views and perspectives as participants explored their experiences in the context of the feminist classroom. As I composed an analysis after the intensive engagement with the data that the LG requires (Gilligan, 2015; Petrovic et al., 2015), I identified 3 key narratives that framed the stories participants shared. I have labelled these as:

1. Awakenings and Transformations
2. Care and Nurture
3. Resistance and Defiance

The first of these I will discuss in this chapter. The subsequent chapters will discuss in turn the other two narratives. This first narrative I have termed 'Awakenings and Transformations' to reflect a composite of expressions from participants in which they explicitly discussed or alluded to a growing realisation about the value of feminist perspectives, and their own developing feminist subjectivities. This has similarity with Freire's ([1970] 1996) concept of conscientisation, the idea that critical awareness and engagement ensue when teaching situations promote reflection and action. In addition, participants identified a growing awakening to a range of other inequalities that can both intersect with gender and be apart from gender. These threads were evident to varying degrees in the contributions of all the participants in the study. The discussion of this narrative in this chapter will explore how participants reflected on their developing understandings of feminism, the value of feminist perspectives to debates about gender injustices and other structural inequalities, and their growing sense of identification with feminism and feminists. In this exploration as I interrogate the participants' stories, I link them to literature connected to feminist pedagogy, feminist theory, and feminist research, as

discussed in previous chapters. The relevance of feminism to social work, the career goal of the participants, is also explored as I develop the discussion throughout this chapter.

In order to enact critical reflexivity (as discussed in chapter 3), it is important to point out that in this and the subsequent two chapters as I interrogate the data; I am co-constructing participants' stories. Through a process of co-construction narrative feminist researchers, weave stories rather than try to represent a single truth (Fraser and MacDougall, 2017). Inevitably, voices of participants will be lost and subsumed by the emphases I as the researcher give to the analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). In other contexts, I may have worked with participants at this stage of the project rather than exclude them from the analysis, but the expectations and constraints of this project prevent this. I have to take responsibility for my PhD thesis to ensure it remains on track. Additionally, I do not think it is realistic to expect the participants who have already contributed so much to commit to further engagement with what is after all a project largely for my benefit.

Finally, drawing on the work of Doucet and Mauthner (2008), it is important to note that I view the participants' accounts presented here to be those of narrated subjects, thus the stories they have shared with me may differ from those they share in other contexts. The narratives they have produced in the context of this research are performative and representational, not reflections of reality (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner, 2017). I present here one of the '…many different ways of writing the subject' (Anderson, 2001:87). After Orner (1992) I try to resist presuming that the notions of identity they shared were singular, authentic and stable. My use of the LG enabled me to access the dimensions of the narrated subject or what Tamboukou (2018:1) calls a 'narrative persona'. The LG is a clear method that helps qualitative researchers address the question of what can be known (Foster, 2013) and is '…a multi-layered way of tapping into methodological, theoretical, epistemological, and ontological dimensions of the narrated subject' (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008:399).

5.2 Awakening to Feminist Perspectives and Developing Feminist Subjectivities

As participants discussed their experiences in interviews, focus groups and reflective journals, there were occasions when they remarked on how they were increasingly developing a feminist perspective as an outcome of being in the feminist classroom. Lena's experience of this was presented in the previous chapter, where I used it to illustrate how I worked through the first listening of the LG method of analysis. However, other participants offered similar stories to Lena's. The following is an extract from a focus group where four of the participants discussed with me their engagement with feminism:

Adrienne

Before this, I, before actually my last year in Uni, I knew it was a thing, but I never thought of it much, but then when I started writing, and, up, more my dissertation, doing this. I think I'm becoming a feminist; you know the more I read back on everything I wrote; I think I do sound like a feminist actually. You know when I go into everything and yeah so. I think I have swayed the other way.

Bell

Yeah me too. I think it's the way I write now, just in my writing cos a lot of the things I wrote about for my blog for [Tutor's name]. I always read it back, and always sound like I'm like I'm pro women. [Laughter from others in the group]

Interviewer (GM)

But that, is that a problem though?

Bell and Adrienne [together]

No, No.

Kimberle

But that's it, it's almost like, there's a shame admitting you're feminist …

Interviewer (GM)

Yeah

Kimberle

Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer (GM)

Yeah

Adrienne

Things have changed in my house though and everything, like when I had my son, I'd do everything, and I really really struggled. Now as times are moving on, my actual boyfriend does more than me at home now. So, I can tell how when I have changed my way of thinking, my role has also changed in the house as well. I don't do as much as what I did before. My boyfriend helps more, so really, it's improved my life.

Interviewer (GM)

It's interesting, I'm not being [pause], but "my boyfriend helps more" [laughter] but, I mean, it's his child as well and it's his, he's got an equal investment in the relationship?

Adrienne

That's when I was thingy, when his mother was, well you're the woman, you do. I had to make bacon butties, I was like I don't even eat bacon, go away. [Laughter from the group]

Interviewer (GM)

What about feminism? Any thoughts on feminism? [Directing the question to Miriam to include her]

Miriam

I'm a bit more passionate I guess about it, like I'd never really talk about but now when people like, I was in a pub the other week, just with my family and my uncle said something, and I just jumped on him and I was like you can't say that, everybody was looking at me, like "God she's been reading too much at Uni or she "

Interviewer (GM)

She's been radicalised, yeah

Miriam

He just made a throwaway some comment, so I just went, yeah, something about ironing or something I just went

Adrienne

I think if you just look at the government with the ratio of men to women that just proves everything doesn't it? I reckon women could run the country better definitely [laughter from the group].

The previous extract represents a clear narrative of awakening to the need for feminist perspectives, and the value of applying them to one's own experiences. It further supports that an academic environment can play an important role in supporting the being and becoming of a feminist or choosing to identify as feminist (Swirsky and Angelone, 2016). Guest (2016) has also discussed this. In Guest's work, and in the extract just presented, the experiences shared identify how pre-existing feminist inclinations, or 'feminist instincts' (Guest, 2016:472) benefited from access to academic feminism, which provided tools to better articulate views and ideas. Recently Crossley (2017) has posited how essential colleges and universities are to feminism's continued existence. However, it is worth noting that feminist activity can and does exist outside of academia, it is important to recognise this as activism too, in order to avoid being exclusionary.

This conclusion about the role of academic spaces was further supported in this study by Bell, who in a one to one interview, talked more about her growing interest in feminism, which was prompted by the discussions in the feminist classroom:

> *Definitely it's made me, erm, it's made me quite interested in feminism, cos I want to go on to do social work, looking at feminist perspectives of social work and stuff.*

Later she offered:

> *I didn't really know enough, and it's not something you ever talk about as a topic of conversation. I mean I don't think I've heard my mum, or my nanna talk about feminism. I don't think it would ever have cropped up, so I think that it's given me a really good opportunity to learn about it and want to learn more now. It's definitely changed cos now I think of feminism in a positive way and it's made me want to know a bit more***.**

Further on in the interview she returned to this topic to demonstrate the way in which her newly found interest in feminism was supporting her learning on her degree course:

I've also made my social work assignment, I've used feminism, I've wanted to look at how feminism and domestic violence is linked in social work. I'm reading about that at the moment and it's really interesting cos I didn't know that it was through feminism that the domestic violence laws came about. Which is really interesting.

Miriam had similar contributions to make about how learning about feminism was supporting her learning. The following extract is from a focus group discussion that took place during her postgraduate social work training, which was about 18 months after our feminist classroom sessions. Miriam was reflecting back on how the feminist perspectives discussed in the feminist classroom became useful when she and Kimberle had to find a critical focus for an assignment on their course. She says:

We were both like "We'll use feminism", cos we felt, like, we had more of an understanding of that.

Later she shows that she has come to realise how it applies on placement too as she says:

In practice it applies, but it seemed to apply all the time, yeah you're applying a feminist perspective all the time on the outlooks that you have.

She recognises it is an inclusive approach saying:

It doesn't matter whether you're working with a male or a female, and males can still use the feminist perspective. You don't just have to be a female to use that approach.

The positivity evident in participants' comments is reminiscent of some of my own experiences and those of other feminists when the value of feminism first came to be realised. Often it is a higher education setting that can prompt this awakening, as Banyard (2010:9) noted 'It wasn't until I got to university that I discovered feminism was still relevant.' Similarly, Coate Bignell (1996:323)

observed '…many women first encounter feminism in the university and it subsequently changes their lives.' Kath Woodward discussed academic feminism in the 1980s and 1990s saying:

> '… among students encountering feminist ideas for the first time, there was an enormous exhilaration at being permitted both to speak as a woman and to hear other women's voices detailing women's contributions historically and valuing women's experience in public and private life, as well as accessing explanatory frameworks and theories through which they could make sense of these experiences' (Woodward and Woodward, 2009: 3).

The participants' comments above, which took place two decades later, could be said to endorse this view. The participants' comments also highlight the ways in which their critical thinking has developed over the course of engagement in feminist spaces. All participants acknowledge how they have shifted from positions of acceptance to more questioning stances. Adrienne has '*swayed the other way*', Bell acknowledges she increasingly sounds like she is '*pro women'*, and Miriam sees it can readily be applied on many occasions. Feminist pedagogy values critical analysis and self-reflexivity (Costa and Leong, 2012), and Light (2015) highlighted the ability of feminist pedagogy to enable critical thinking and create and support change. In addition, Silva Flores (2015: 50) claimed '…the ability to think and act critically is at the heart of feminist pedagogy.'

Contributions in the extracts above reinforce these as benefits of feminist pedagogy. In Adrienne, for example there is clear evidence that she considers her ability to think critically has produced gains in her personal life. She recognises the 'personal is the political' (McCann and Kim, 2013:23) as she discusses how personal relationships applied pressure for her to conform to gender stereotypes that she was uncomfortable with. In an interview she elaborated further about the feminist classroom's ability to support better understanding of inequalities saying:

After doing these sessions definitely I think now I understand women a lot more, even though I am a woman. I understand women a lot more and the pressures that we go through in life is totally different to men, so I feel like we should approach women a lot differently to how we would approach men, and I feel like women are significant like to the family as well. We're not given enough support so I definitely would when I do social work support women a lot better than they are now.

Audre shared similar sentiments in a focus group; she discussed growing up in Nigeria, and said:

Yeah, yeah, like she said, erm it makes me to think about my experience of the past and makes me aware I was under an oppressed situation. But at that time, I didn't know it was an oppressed situation. But I now have an understanding of what oppression is looking back to my experiences.

Kimberle in her reflective journal wrote about how discussions in the feminist classroom supported her to move from a position of believing she had not experienced discrimination or disadvantage as a result of her gender:

My understandings since have changed, and now that I am a single mother, I have become to realise that as a woman I do seem to be at a disadvantage. I feel that I am at a disadvantage as I have to care for my daughter … I feel like I've done a day's work before my lectures even start… I feel that I have to just accept it.

Later, she wrote about the feminist classroom saying:

It made me realise that the inequality I experienced during my relationship with my daughter's father was in some ways indicative of society on the whole.

Her thoughts here demonstrate how opportunities afforded by the feminist classroom to use experience as a resource (Lawson, 2011; Lawrence, 2016),

privilege individual voices (Webb et al., 2002), and give authenticity to students' experiences (hooks, 1994; Coate Bignell, 1996) supported a new understanding on gender inequalities. In addition, they support Lawson's (2011: 114) claim that feminist pedagogy:

> '… also changes how students interact with their peers, intimate partners, and family members, as they begin to ask pertinent questions about social arrangements previously taken for granted.'

In an interview Kimberle elaborated further on this understanding:

> *No, I did think it was my fault, but then I realised that [pause] you know that's just yeah, what the system was like. I was going to be left holding the baby, I didn't realise, it being my first child, I didn't realise that that's how it would work out, but it was almost that was my [pause], the path was already written for me, no matter what I wanted to do, that was it, that you know, you have a baby and you give up everything else, and that's it, and that I found quite hard. But yes, I, it does make me feel better that it wasn't me being the bad person or not a good mum or selfish for wanting to do other things, erm you know that was just how it was gonna be.*

In this extract Kimberle discusses how she initially looked to herself for explanations, before adopting a wider view, and recognising structural constraints. Such a focus on self may reflect she is responding to the dominance of neoliberal perspectives which promote the notion of a subject who self regulates and determines their own destiny (Dawson, 2013). The last three decades have witnessed a 'neoliberal ascendency' (Rohrer, 2018: 579), in Western countries, and as I pointed out in chapter 2 its reach is increasingly global. Fraser (2013a, 2013b) argued that in a neoliberal context, structural gender inequalities are denied; obscured and delegitimised. Kimberle's words above could be seen to support this claim, as she invested in a discourse of individuality and individual choice, the likes of which can easily be generated in neoliberal socio-political environments (Walkerdine, 2003; Fenton, 2018). Francis et al., (2014) identified too how undergraduates tend to subscribe to

individualist perspectives and narratives, which have the effect of concealing how gender, race and class continue to have significant impacts on higher education relations and pedagogical experiences. These authors suggest opening up opportunities for students to critically reflect and debate the salience of structural factors may be productive. Interestingly, this was an aim for this project.

There are 'complex entanglements' between neoliberalism and gender (Scharff, 2014: online), and part of this is related to how it dovetails with postfeminism (Rumens, 2018), as these two are 'deeply enmeshed' (Gill, 2016:613). Liu (2019) discussed the seductive nature of postfeminism, which has supported it to enjoy a rise to dominance in our neoliberal times. Participants' awakening to feminism in this study can be explored in the context of the concept of postfeminism (McRobbie, 2009; Gill and Scharff, 2011). Postfeminism and neoliberal discourses, and their dominance and effects have been discussed in chapters 1 and 2, I extend my discussion of them here.

In the focus group extract presented earlier in this chapter, Adrienne says of feminism *'I never thought of it much'*, and Miriam says she would never really talk about it. In another focus group, Lena too shared a similar tendency to not consider feminism. I asked her how much she had thought about feminism prior to our feminist classroom meetings and she said: *I didn't really think about it in detail…* Such comments could be viewed as symptoms of '…a global neoliberal feminist discourse' (Lazar, 2014:734) that emerged in the late 1980s, claiming debates about sexism are irrelevant and not in need of critique as they have been settled. That participants in this study feel this way is perhaps unsurprising, since many of them spent their formative years in the 1990s, when popular culture participated in eliding, denying and disavowing feminism, presenting it as no longer necessary, as the concerns it once had have now been taken into account and resolved (McRobbie, 2009). Media narratives too at this time normalised postfeminist views, which meant girls embodied a postfeminist culture, as they had no experience of any other type of feminist culture (Maharajh, 2014). One effect of this was to make feminism unpopular; as postfeminism constructed it as 'extreme, difficult and unpleasurable.' (Tasker and Negra, 2007:4), as a result its

unpopularity amongst young women was well documented in the 2000s (Scharff, 2012).

Postfeminism is a term about which there are '…very real disputes and contestations over its meanings' (Gill and Scharff, 2011:3). It originated as a description of how young women in the 1980s had a new and different consciousness to that of previous generations (Ortner, 2014). It has since been portrayed in a number of different ways. Gill (2016) identified it has been characterised as a backlash against feminism, a means to align with post movements such as poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcoloniality, and as a term to propose a move from so called 'Second Wave' feminism towards a 'Third Wave'. McRobbie (2009) presents it as a kind of anti-feminism that is also a faux feminism, as it claims to have listened to feminism, and enacted its goals, whilst establishing an individualistic discourse that aims to ensure collective movements of women will not re-emerge. Postfeminism on the surface gives emphasis to feminist values of freedom, choice and empowerment, alongside a reinforcing of patriarchal notions about female sexuality and feminine beauty (Liu, 2019). Prevailing problematic assumptions about gender are evident in the new feminism promised by postfeminism (Lazar, 2014). Consequently, as Dean (2010) notes, it is not a straightforward renunciation of feminism, more of a taming of it into something less threatening.

Bromley (2012:144) argues that postfeminism:

> '… discounts, appropriates, revises, depoliticizes and trivialises feminisms. It puts forth the notion that feminism *was* needed at one time and that women benefited; however, feminism is no longer necessary because "we are all equal now".'

Participants in this study received these postfeminist messages as the extracts above reflect. Further support for this was provided in the following from Kimberle's reflective journal; she discussed reflecting on her views towards discrimination and injustices prior to the feminist classroom, and stated:

I think I had been taken in by the term 'we live in an equal society'. I was naïve.

The opportunity for critical thinking provided by the feminist classroom prompted a rethinking of her worldview. She had bought the 'Equality Illusion' (Banyard, 2010:12), but later rejected it. Others in a focus group shared the following comments about the value of the feminist classroom to encouraging a new perspective on inequities.

Bell said:

I think it's just made me more aware of [pause] just things are more accepted in society, that women are oppressed, but you see it more.

Adrienne said:

I think it has helped me realise where I have been discriminated against in my life, if you know what I mean. You've said things and I've thought "Oh my God that's happened to me". So, it's made me understand that a lot more, which helps me understand everything a lot more as well.

A neoliberal discourse precludes a gender critique, as it demands from women in particular '…self-surveillance, self-discipline and individual empowerment through choice…' (McKnight, 2016:224). As Liu (2019:31) remarked:

'Patriarchy and neoliberalism have thus become cosy bedfellows under postfeminism, finding more subtle ways to elide feminist critique.'

An absence of critique can mean injustices are accepted and unchallenged. This was evidenced a number of times in the above-mentioned focus group. When asked if when facing or witnessing injustices it occurred to them to look to wider contexts for explanations the following exchange ensued:

Adrienne

You just accept it yourself, don't you? You think…

Kimberle [interrupts Adrienne]

It's part of life

Adrienne

Yeah.Yeah.

Miriam

It feels like the norm, yeah, it's just normal that like [pause], and this class like has kind of shown that it's not normal and that it's not acceptable.

The notion that feminism is passé, displaced, or an embarrassing relic of the past is also a feature of postfeminism (McRobbie, 2009; Bromley, 2012), and Kimberle's claim in a focus group (cited earlier) that *'it's almost like, there's a shame admitting you're feminist.'* could be seen to reflect this. Perhaps she is responding to anti-feminist sentiments that aim to deter women from engaging with feminism by presenting it as '…a monstrous ugliness which would send shudders of horror down the spines of young women today…' (McRobbie, 2009:1). Therefore, they '…seek to divorce themselves from the image of the unfeminine woman and anti-men sentiments' (Gray and Boddy, 2010: 382). Repudiating feminism was widespread amongst young women in Scharff's (2012) research, and the concept of postfeminism is considered to have played a significant role in this.

Kimberle's comment about feeling shame in admitting to feminism was quickly lost in the context of the focus group. Whilst this can be seen to show how focus groups reflect everyday conversations with the to and fro of ideas, perhaps in this context it can indicate a disadvantage of focus groups. However, the detailed examination of individual voices that the use of the LG demands, required me to look for where one voice has been interrupted or silenced (Gilligan and Eddy,

2017), this has resulted in ensuring Kimberle's view has been acknowledged here. In addition, she returned to discuss feminism in her interview as the following extract indicates:

Kimberle

I thought it was a dirty word to be honest

Interviewer GM

Right

Kimberle

erm I did really just think it was quite, it was so far removed from [pause]

Interviewer GM:

Your experience?

Kimberle

from my er yeah

Interviewer GM:

So, you weren't a willing signer upper

Kimberle

No No, not at all

Interviewer GM

to feminism [laughs]?

Kimberle

No. I mean I told someone, I told someone yesterday, that's sort of how I thought about it, she asked me what my dissertation was on, I was trying to explain it and I said I'm gonna look at it you know from a feminist perspective, she went "Aghh" [Kimberle expresses this loudly], like that. As soon as you say the word and it's that kind of attitude isn't it, you know?

Interviewer GM

Yeah

Kimberle

Oh, those bra burning, that …

Interviewer GM:

Killjoys.

Kimberle

Yeah but that, so now that I understand it more and realise it's helped me understand all about, you know, make sure of my own things in my life and stuff erm. Yeah, no I think I have a lot better understanding and it has made things easier to [pause] like you say it's the lens isn't it, to look at things?

Kimberle was not the only participant to reveal resistance to feminism and reluctance to align with it. In an interview, Adrienne expressed similar views when she recalled how her mother tried to persuade her to exercise her right to vote:

My mum actually, when it came to voting, I never wanted to vote, cos I never believed in it, what any of them believed in. So, I didn't vote, and she was like "Well women burnt their knickers for you, mad crazy women burnt their knickers for you, so you could vote."

As a consequence, this gave Adrienne a negative view of feminism, she says:

When I first thought of feminism, I was thinking of the women that burnt their knickers, [laughs] mad women I suppose. But now I don't, I realise that they're fighting for all of us.

In a later focus group, Kimberle and Miriam reflect again on their previous attitudes toward feminism:

Kimberle

I would literally, if someone had accused me of being a feminist, I would have run a mile and denied it.

Miriam

There's a stigma to it.

Kimberle

I had no idea I thought it was a label, a derogatory label that you didn't want to be associated with.

At a later date, Miriam in another focus group shared the response received when she and Kimberle whilst taking part in a discussion about discrimination on their MA social work studies, struggled to get others to acknowledge gender discrimination. She said:

There are a lot of people on our course who are very opinionated and very, some are unable to see other people's viewpoints, and it and it wasn't particularly men, the male members of the class who were put out. It was just a bit like, I don't understand how they couldn't, they just couldn't see it, the fact that as women, yeah it was one of them that [pause] it caused a few ripples.

She later said:

I think there's such a stigma with it like if you say you know "Oh I'm a feminist" or you know like Kimberle said "We're all discriminated against because were women." I think people automatically think you're some crazy men hating person and it's, and I think that's a misconception that a lot of people have.

Audre

Or you're trying to compete with a man

Miriam

Yeah and it's not that you want to be better than them, you just want to be treated the same as them, and I yeah you know people see it as women hating on men and they want to be better than them, and they want this to come out and that.

Such animosity to feminism and the presentation of it in derogatory ways are not new and make it hard to cultivate feminist perspectives. The dirty word concept is regularly invoked and debated in discussions about feminism, as discussed by Richards and Parker (1995) Harding et al., (2012) and McKnight (2016). Fear about how the word will be responded to also results in rejection of the label, even in cases where views expressed are consistent with feminism (Huckaby, 2013). Dahlgreen (2015) reported that despite most people in Britain feeling there was still a need for feminism, identifying as a feminist was not popular.

White (2006) reported how social workers in her study did not align themselves with feminism in order to describe their work and were more willing to connect it to emancipatory perspectives in general than they were to use it as a self-identifier. Hoskin et al., (2017a) note that efforts to reduce the stigma associated with the word often fail and it remains regarded as an insult. Negativity of this sort is not just a feature of Western perspectives; Zheng (2017) discovered that Chinese students could also hold negative stereotypes about feminists that align with some prevalent in the West. As a consequence, she found some in her sample resisted or were ambivalent about adopting a feminist label. It still seems that:

> 'There are a number of stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding the feminist movement leading many women who self-identify to simultaneously combat both continued patriarchy and negative social labels' (Swirsky and Angelone 2016: 445).

Stereotypes, misconceptions and cynical tropes of feminism can also result in an unwillingness to identify as a feminist, a 'dis-identification' (Scharff, 2012: 14), and a feeling that it is of little value. As part of a feminist backlash Limbaugh (1992:193) discussed the 'feminazi', decrying all feminists as power obsessed and dogmatic. Such an image rendered feminism as an unspeakable word, serving to silence some feminists (Moi, 2006). It contributes to presenting feminists as somehow against nature or unnatural, so it is not surprising that in a focus group Rosalind says:

> *I would say I'm a feminist in maybe fifty fifty. Sometimes I will support feminists sometimes I would just leave it to the way as nature created*

She goes on to say she believes in equal education and employment rights but worries it might mean girls become less caring, and how this would create a gap in society. She describes how she and her sisters take care of their ageing father, and their brothers do not, and she connects this to her Nigerian upbringing and culture.

Rosalind's contribution here was resonant of the so-called 'First Wave' feminist debates, which I have discussed, in my earlier chapters. An essentialist and biological determinist perspective is also evident in what she says. Western feminist theory has spent considerable effort shifting attention away from biology as a means to explain inequalities (Davis, 2007). Haraway's (1991) cyborg metaphor, which saw the body as capable of morphing into many new forms, also aimed to disrupt such binary concepts. Views such as those presented by Rosalind above are however not easy to shift. Lena explained that she saw the action of Rosalind and her sisters in caring for their father as reflecting '*…we've just got caring hearts, girls. We've got empathy, emotional type things.'* Although I tried to frame this in relation to nature versus nurture debates in response, I was conscious too that both of these participants have African heritage, and as a white Western feminist it is necessary for me to listen to their comments with respect. Nadar (2014) an African woman says she uses the term feminist to describe herself but recognises other African women's reluctance to use the term. I witnessed this too as the following extracts from my reflective diary demonstrate:

> *I am conscious that Audre does not show the same enthusiasm for feminism as the others. She is more animated when we talk about racial oppression* (GM Reflective Journal entry March 2015).

> *Audre responded really positively to our discussion about Audre Lorde, hopefully seeing that feminism has offered something to this Black woman might encourage her to engage more with it* (GM Reflective Journal entry March 2015).

> *Rosalind and Lena were quiet today. Once again, I wonder about how I can support them to engage more with feminism. Rosalind had an article about domestic violence in Nigeria, which she was looking at for her dissertation. I was able to use it as a stimulus to discuss women's oppression, this led to a more fruitful discussion about feminism, than those we have had in the past* (GM Reflective Journal entry November 2015).

Reading bell hooks' work supports me to develop a better understanding of Black women's oppression. I can take this understanding into my work with Black women students. hooks has argued that many Black women are ambivalent about feminist perspectives, and disavow engagement with feminism as they are:

> 'Uncertain about whether feminist movement would really change the lives of black females in a meaningful way, they were not willing to assume and assert a feminist standpoint' (hooks, 1994: 124).

Black women's engagement with feminism has been discussed in more detail in chapter 1. Audre's, Lena's and Rosalind's feminist inclinations, like mine are mediated by other subjectivities, which can structure our engagement with feminism. Audre expressed this well in a one to one interview when discussing her admiration for Maya Angelou she said:

> *It stands out for me. Wow! If she could go up to that level, wow! It's not about gender, but she really backs women up. Being a black woman as well, because it is one thing to be a woman, it's another thing to come from the black race. So I, being black, even my work you see, when you are a black person compared to a white person, no matter your level of intellect you have, the colour is still affecting… so you see somebody has done it before, you think, I can as well, do it again.*

In this instance, the feminist classroom supported Audre to express her recognition of intersectionality, that is, that marginalised subjects' lived experiences are multidimensional (Crenshaw, 1989), and 'gendered inequalities are always complex 'embodied intersections' with other social differences of class, ethnicity, and race amongst multiple other inequalities.' (Burke, 2017: 432). The notion of intersectionality has been explored in more detail in previous chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.

It is evident that adopting feminist perspectives and subjectivities are complex processes. They can be assisted by academic environments whilst at the same

time be mediated by other experiences. Neoliberal and postfeminist discourses can disrupt feminism's progress and limit possibilities of people's awakening to it and being transformed by it. However, disengagement with or resistance to feminism is complicated by other factors too as further demonstrated by a story shared by Kimberle.

Kimberle is a white woman who was born and raised in South Africa during Apartheid. In her reflective journal she wrote about how this experience made her reluctant to see herself as oppressed. She abhorred the privilege her white skin gave her in these circumstances and did not want to believe that a white woman could experience discrimination and oppression. She wrote:

> *What I had witnessed was on such a grand scale and so obvious I really didn't believe that as a white woman I had experienced discrimination or oppression. I think I believed that now living in the UK treating women as subordinates wouldn't really happen as it is unfair, and people wouldn't get away with it.*

It seems therefore, there are many dynamics that facilitate the rejection of feminism, and whether or not a relationship with it can be negotiated. Some reject it as it seems to imply victimhood (Wolf, 1993) or it assumes a white woman's position (Lorde, [1984] 2007; hooks, 1994; Morgan, 1999; Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005), or it invokes a fear of being stigmatised as radical, lesbian, and man hating militants (Siegal, 1997; Gray and Boddy, 2010). Scharff (2012:16) identified how engagement with it is influenced by perceptions of its:

> '… inclusiveness/exclusiveness in relation to privileged/stigmatised positionings; a felt distance/closeness to feminism; and feminism's appeal to women (men) from different cultural, class and ethnic backgrounds…'

Returning to the data, and thinking more positively, I note many participants, although being aware of and even subscribing to negative views of feminism at times, revealed a change of heart as a consequence of our work, and declared they had been awakened to new and more positive views of feminism. Indeed,

Adrienne in an interview revealed that her developing feminism has become noticeable to others when she said: *My boyfriend says as well, I'm a feminist now.* In addition, she showed she is starting to embrace a feminist subjectivity with her *I think I'm becoming a feminist,* as she stated in a focus group (cited earlier). Kimberle also declared a change in her perceptions, when in a focus group stated:

> … *actually, it's your friend but we didn't know, do you know what I mean?*

For Adrienne, Kimberle, and others in the study engagement with feminism was able to offer them better understanding of their experiences, as well as an understanding of other structural inequalities that they can take into their future social work and social care practice. Feminist pedagogy as a critical perspective supports students to engage as political beings so that:

> 'By understanding their own social positions, students can begin to build a critical understanding of social inequities, and by reflecting on their own lives, as well as their actions, they can actively challenge and interrupt hegemonic ideologies' (Rodriguez et al., 2012: 96).

5.3 Awakening to Wider Structural Inequalities: Adopting an Intersectional Approach

Feminism, as I have discussed in my earlier chapters, is diverse, complex, paradoxical, heterogeneous, mutable, and resistant to a neat definition. It demands radical change on a number of social, economic, political, and personal fronts. David (2016) acknowledges that as an outcome of feminist research over recent decades the complexity of people's lives is increasingly understood. The concept of intersectionality (discussed too in my earlier chapters) is increasingly important to many feminists in academic circles as a means to acknowledge the myriad ways in which injustices and inequalities mar the lives of women and men. Indeed, Hoskin et al., (2017) claimed that a definition of feminism that integrates intersectionality increased people's likelihood of adopting a feminist identity.

Intersectionality is an approach that enables examination of how inequities cross over one another. It is a theoretical framework that supports understanding of social phenomena (Hoskin et al., 2017a). Axes of oppression are mutually reinforcing as they are inextricably linked, feminists therefore need to look to how sexism works with other systems of oppression (Hannam, 2012). Intersectional approaches can act as tools to support examination of the '… multiple dimensions of oppression and how various axes of identity negotiate (i.e. appease or magnify) discrimination' (Hoskin et al., 2017b: 4).

As already stated, it is a concept that I can apply to the data for this thesis. The participants held ambitions for careers as professional social workers; this means, there was a necessity to support the development of emancipatory practices that they can take into their future work. Emancipatory social work is '…person centred, empowering, critical of power structures and systems of resource distribution that undermine the well-being of many' (Dominelli, 2010: 2). Such practice, according to Rogowski (2014a, 2014b) is vital for equality, albeit increasingly difficult in current managerial circumstances. As stated already, an aim of my work was to support better understanding of many structural inequalities as we worked in the feminist classroom. Bondy et al., (2015) asserted that feminist pedagogy makes issues of social inequalities central to the curriculum in order to encourage students:

> '…to challenge traditional assumptions, ask critical questions about the world around them, and make connections between and among learning experiences, often with a view to generating social change' (Bondy et al., 2015:4).

I argue that such activity should be at the heart of social work education. In this study, many of the participants' contributions reflected a growing awakening to the extent and impact of inequalities on the lives of service users. The feminist classroom gave opportunities for deeper engagement with these issues. In the context of this thesis, these wider changes that feminist pedagogy can promote are important and represent its transformative potential.

Adrienne in a focus group discussed how she had minimal understanding of the important concepts of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice prior to our meetings. If asked what they mean she said she would say:

> *Where you treat someone differently [said in a deliberately timid voice]. It was dead hard to explain it cos I actually didn't have good understanding of it. I know what it is, if you know what I mean, but I can't explain what it is. I know if I'm doing it, but I can't explain what it is, and that, until we done these lessons*

In the same focus as above. Kimberle shared:

> *Well, I think when I started on this, I thought I had an understanding of inequalities and discrimination and oppression, but in reality I didn't, it was, it was just a word, and then obviously you've given us like a deeper understanding and I've been able to, to ah, erm. I don't know, but I [pause] you've given me more information, more knowledge, and that I can appreciate that [pause] I understand it to a deeper level, if you understand.*

As emancipatory perspectives became better understood, the feminist classroom prompted participants to think differently about social injustices in the lives of service users. Participants experienced a growing awakening to wider social inequalities and injustices, as the following quotes highlight:

> *Sometimes if you have got a disability and you put it on applications or stuff like that maybe to get a job, they might feel like they're perfectly capable to do that job. They don't feel like they've got a disability but the society or whatever have labelled them as having a disability so straight away they are kind of erm crossed out. So, inequality is everywhere, it's like you know, you can get erm discriminated for your race, erm, your religion, all this kind of stuff, your disability, you know like especially homeless people get discriminated against a lot. [Lena in a focus group]*

Kimberle in another focus group discusses her work in a women's prison, and says:

> *Yeah there are a lot women in there that you know on the face of it you think oh they're in prison, cos they've done bad things, but then, you know when, you, you know, they're not all in there for violent crimes, some of them, are people in there for not paying their TV license, and not sending their children to school and [pause] but, because if you know, you look back at it, they've had issues, they've had child abuse, you know, they've got er alcohol misuse and drug and stuff and then because they're having their children taken away from them as well [pause] they've got all these problems that are compounding the issues. So, they've been doubly punished.*

Both of these quotes reflect a political awakening and highlight that '…within feminist pedagogy, teaching and education are political and rooted in a struggle against racism, sexism and other forms of oppression.' (Crabtree and Sapp, 2003:132). To support this form of awakening I encouraged participants to reflect on the numerous ways in which inequalities are enacted. Feminist classrooms are politicised contexts (Fisher, 2001; Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015), they can give rise to actions to effect change (Weiler, 2001), and the critiques of social structures that feminist perspectives enable and afford can make change achievable (Briskin, 2015). The engaged teaching that develops from it is '…an expression of political activism' (hooks, 1994:203). Feminist pedagogy therefore:

> '…acknowledges that the classroom is a site of gender, race, and class inequalities, and simultaneously a site of political struggle and change. It recognizes that teaching and learning have the potential to be about liberation' (Briskin and Coulter, 1992:251).

Making changes that aim to redress inequalities is central to feminism's, feminist pedagogy's, and social work's goals. Approaching teaching from a feminist perspective '…helps lay the foundation for educating civically engaged and critically responsible citizens capable of transforming our world.' (Light, 2015:

285). I believe, like Seethaler (2014:39) 'feminist concepts and theory prepare students holistically to understand oppression and its intersectional nature…'

To advance this holistic understanding I wanted to honour the experiential diversity evident in the stories of all participants. Thus, in the feminist classroom I encouraged participants to share their experiences according to their own understandings of disadvantage, this did not have to be based entirely, and only, on gender injustices. As a consequence, some provided details about experiences of racism and class prejudice.

Erica used her reflective journal to recall her school days in Portugal whereas the only Black pupil in the class she felt she faced discrimination. After failing the majority of taught units for the year she was identified as having special educational needs, she wrote:

> *When I first entered the "special needs" room I knew straight away that I was not like the other students. But how teachers have come to this conclusion, until this day I don't know. What intrigues me is the fact that they never sent me to an Educational Psychologist to identify if I had any learning disability or anything of the sort. Their poor judgement was biased by the assumption that I failed my units because I was Black and poor and that consequently meant that good grades were not meant for me…I was being treated different not because I had a disability as they thought, but mainly because of their prejudice against my race and social status.*

Other participants openly discussed experiences of racism too. Rosalind used her reflective journal to share the following about being refused a job because of her race:

> *When I lived in Italy there was a time when I was told openly that they couldn't give a black a job because the job was meant to be given to a white. If I had any opportunity, I would have left the job open to all.*

In the following quote, Sharlene in a focus group, commented on the opportunities provided by the feminist classroom to enable more awareness of the extent of discrimination faced by Black people:

> *I think the fact that as well, we are a minority in this country we face so many discriminations, so if we don't know how to sort of like say something or how to challenge it, it keeps happening, it keeps happening. Now because we know from the conversations, we had with you and everything you know it actually sort of like raised the awareness so, it is better for us, but other people they don't even know how to challenge it. So sometimes you lose your job, you lose your confidence. These conversations are really good because they're actually teaching us more about things.*

These quotes reflect the potential for teaching practices based on feminist perspectives to encourage reflection on one's experiences in order to raise awareness and facilitate better understanding of them. At times that reflection can lead to the sharing of experiences that reminded me of do Mar Pereira's (2012) characterisation of feminist classrooms as intense spaces requiring emotionally demanding work. In addition, the following from Larson (2005:138) seemed relevant:

> 'The feminist classroom is decisively one in which tears, anger, silence, joy, and enthusiasm co-exist and are normalized as part of the learning process.'

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the narrative of 'Awakenings and Transformations', which I identified as an overarching narrative in the data. My use of the LG as a method of data analysis supported me to identify this narrative as present in many of the transcripts from interviews and focus groups, and in addition, evident in participants' reflective journals. This intense method of data analysis entails deep engagement with one's data, this can then give confidence to claims made about the narratives identified and analysed.

As I have discussed participants contributions in this chapter, I have tried to include input from as many participants as possible. Inevitably, some will feature more than others; this is related to how much they participated in the research. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, some participants were more heavily involved in the research than others. In addition, participants' presence in this chapter, and the subsequent two, is also connected to whether or not their stories lent themselves to the narrative under discussion.

Furthermore, as mentioned in my previous chapter, I undertook the analysis alone; participants were absent from this process. This according to Mauthner and Doucet (1998) can be a problem as participants' voices can be lost or subsumed. My exclusion of participants at the analysis stage was for practical and ethical reasons (it is unreasonable for me to make such demands on their time for a project that is ultimately my individual responsibility). A further consequence of this is that I am central to the construction of their stories and how they are presented here. To enhance the visibility of participants and limit a sense of disembodied voices I have made a concerted effort to give as much space as possible in this chapter to the voices of the participants. Like Maher and Thompson Tetreault (2001:19) I see voice as 'an important feminist metaphor for women's awakenings.' Consequently, in this chapter I have presented extracts too from the discussions that took place.

These discussions provided opportunities to converse about feminism in detail, and explore some of its debates, which meant participants began to interpret their experiences in terms of a feminist lens. They were awakened to a different perspective on feminism. This was encouraging as:

> 'Feminism is still fundamentally about transformation and enlightenment; therefore, feminist educators still attempt in their teaching to give students access to "better" more inclusive, socially just, and non-exploitative knowledge' (Light, 2015:289).

In the data collection phase participants shared stories, which reflected their awakening to feminism, their increasing engagement with feminist perspectives,

and how our experiences in the feminist classroom supported them to rethink existing ideas of feminism. It is interesting to me that the safe space of our feminist classroom was quickly responded to as an alternative to the postfeminist and neoliberal dogma that colours all other aspects of their learning experience. In my next chapter I will discuss how the intimacy and safety offered by the feminist classroom was embraced as a welcome alternative to existing spaces in the neoliberal academy.

As a consequence of our alternative space, some revealed they were feeling increasingly drawn to a need to better understand feminism, and for some a willingness to call themselves feminists. This openness to feminism is despite the enculturation processes of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses which present feminism as necessary in a bygone era, but irrelevant today. It is important to note too that for some participants the feminist classroom was not the only source of positive information about feminism. Miriam, in particular made reference a number of times to public figures that she admired who had made a claim to being feminist. This visibility given to feminism by such people has of course increased since I collected the data for this project. The 'Me Too' movements, discussed in chapter 1 are contributing to a re-examination of feminism's aims and achievements.

The participants as potential social workers were increasingly awakened to deeper understandings of social justice debates that would transform how they conduct their personal and professional lives in the future. Recognising the intersectional nature of lived experiences can support students of social work to better understand service users' perspectives. The feminist classroom enabled an awakening to a broader understanding of wider structural inequalities too. Such understanding, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, is essential if the social justice mandates of social work are to be met.

This narrative of 'Awakenings and Transformations' that I discuss in this chapter helps me to give shape to the stories I listened to. I acknowledge that in telling stories about their lives, participants were partaking in a discursive activity. This narrative is my discursive construction. Therefore, it is not my claim that this

narrative reflects a truth in my data, or that I have been given direct access to participants' self, experiences or identities. After Smith (2017:180) my job is:

> '…not to emancipate true or authentic stories from …participants but rather to explore the relationship between their individual stories and the narratives which frame, shape and influence the construction of those stories.'

The tension evident in this quote reflects a number of the debates existing in feminist research and theory relevant to discussions about the degree to which data in the form of stories, experiences and interpretations are given or constituted reflexively and discursively within a range of frameworks. Feminists working with and in poststructural, postmodern, postcolonial and posthuman frameworks wrestle with such theoretical debates. Use of the LG draws one into these debates, and chapter 4 has discussed this more fully.

However, a casualty of these debates could be devaluing people's stories. In this research I am acutely aware that I want to respect the participants as they tell their stories. I acknowledge that despite neoliberal rhetoric, which claims individual voice is celebrated, the reality for many is that, student voice can be constrained by many factors in the neoliberal academy. Learning environments have been increasingly depersonalised, making building relationships with students harder (Preston and Aslett, 2014). I wanted this research to go some way to redressing such a situation. I am not claiming I have given voice to participants or expressing a 'wish for heroism' (McWilliam et al., 2009: 63). I recognise attention to voice in research encounters requires situating it within a range of frameworks, which disrupt notions of research as a smooth process to knowledge production (Lather, 2009).

As part of this necessity to be a continually challenging researcher, I also recognise that participants' construction of these stories must be critically examined. This is one of the uncomfortable challenges of narrative research, and unless approached as an opportunity to ask critical questions, it risks the accusation that as a researcher you deny or silence participants (Woodiwiss,

2017). The depth and flexibility of the LG as a method of data analysis assists this process to a degree. The I-poems as '… a radical departure from other qualitative methods…' (Forrest et al., 2015:51) support a detailed listening to participants' first person voice. They enable tracing how participants represent themselves (Edwards and Weller, 2012). Therefore, to draw this chapter to a close I present an I-poem constructed from a passage in an interview with Miriam that neatly reflects the 'Awakenings and Transformations' narrative. Here she describes how prior to opportunities presented by the feminist classroom for discussion about gender inequities and injustices, she was oblivious to their extent, and disconnected from the debates:

> I wouldn't register what they were saying
> I wasn't really aware of it.
> I think I mean everybody knew that, the suffragettes and everything,
> I'd never really looked into.
> I didn't realise.
> I don't think I understand it all.
> I didn't realise.
> I thought we were on equal pay.
> I didn't really understand it.
> I didn't,
> It's definitely made me realise.

CHAPTER 6 – Care and Nurture

6.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the second overarching narrative present in the data for the thesis. I have termed this narrative 'Care and Nurture'. It is one of three narratives evident in the data discussed in this thesis. The other two are discussed respectively in the previous chapter 5, and the subsequent chapter 7. As with the narratives of 'Awakenings and Transformations' (chapter 5), and 'Resistance and Defiance' (chapter 7), use of the Listening Guide (LG), as a method of data analysis, led me to identify the narrative of 'Care and Nurture' as present in my data.

Caring for students and nurturing their learning are basic to many pedagogic strategies. Growth and learning are promoted when students feel appreciated, respected and understood (Noddings, 2002). Caring relationships can have a powerful effect on students' ability to learn (Noddings, 1984,1992, 2002, 2005, 2010; Owusu- Ansah and Kyei-Blankson, 2016). Therefore, in the setting up of the feminist classroom, one of my aims was to achieve a supportive, caring, and nurturing space where all involved could feel connected, respected and valued. I linked this to notions of a feminist ethic of care (Gilligan, [1982] 1993; Noddings, 1988; Tronto, 1993). Mountz et al., (2015: 1251) say:

> 'A feminist ethics of care is personal and political, individual and collective. We must take care of ourselves before we can take care of others. *But we must take care of others.'*

I do not consider a feminist ethic of care in an essentialist way but view it as a means to recognise the centrality of relationships and support the development of a sense of connectedness between people. In this context, I interpreted feminist relational theory in a similar way to Llewellyn and Llewellyn (2015: 17), who promote a restorative approach to learning that is rooted in relational theory. For these authors, feminist relational theory;

> '… affirms the significance of the fact of relationship and signals the importance of attending to what is required within relationship to ensure well-being and flourishing.'

Consequently, in this study, as participants discussed their experiences of the feminist classroom, their ideas reflected how the space we had created had marked differences to other learning spaces in the higher education institution in which we were working. Participants repeatedly referred to how they valued the intimacy of the feminist classroom, and how the small group size facilitated the development of a safe space, a space where they felt valued, supported, had a sense of belonging, felt nurtured and cared for. This supported some to speak up and out. It also facilitated relationships and supported the development of a community. With these foundations we were able to focus discussion around injustices and oppression in our lives to develop empathy with others facing inequalities too. This sort of knowledge and understanding is a crucial aspect of the social care /social work field into which the participants were hoping to enter after their studies were completed. Promoting social justice and human rights and applying anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices are among social work's core professional domains in England (BASW, 2018). Such values are also highly rated for the profession in international terms too (IFSW, 2019).

In this chapter I interrogate all of these aspects in terms of how they fitted a care and nurture narrative. As I develop this discussion, I explore how my data connects to feminist pedagogy principles and practices, and how it challenges neoliberal dogma and agendas. I begin with an exposition on an ethic of care, as this provides necessary detail and context to my later arguments. This attention to care is warranted as care is integral to this thesis, and many feminist writers have over decades drawn attention to caregiving as a form of labour that is gendered (Tronto, 1993,2013; Zembylas et al., 2014). Additionally, the teaching context in which the work was conducted was with social care and social work students. Practice here is conducted in the context of professional guidelines, which set standards that refer to caring values and ethics (BASW, 2014; HCPC, 2017a).

6.2 An Ethic of Care

I align myself to Soldatic and Meekosha (2012:248) who stated:

> '…the positioning of a feminist ethic of care within the social work curriculum is a deliberate political act that seeks to encourage a dispositional transformation within students, where new professionals entering the field move from being bound by the utilities of 'duties and responsibilities' to a relational contextual practice of responsiveness and reciprocity.'

For me care is a politicised concept, caring work is still distributed along gender lines with women still more likely to engage in it than men, and the powerful are more likely to prevail on those with less power to do their for caring for them (Bell, 2014; Zembylas et al., 2014; Barnes, 2018). It often goes unnoticed and in terms of material rewards and status is devalued and regularly undervalued (Zembylas et al., 2014). In my teaching practice I find this aspect difficult at times. Students, who are mostly female and working class, and often from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, get into debt due to tuition fees, yet in this area the jobs available to them, in social care especially, do not require a degree, do not have much status, and often do not pay well. Care is closely tied to justice, and like Sevenhuijsen (1998), and Barnes (2011, 2012, 2018), I believe care is an essential public and personal value, and should be important to everyone, as '… relations and responsibilities of care are central to human life' (Robinson, 2011: 845).

Tronto (1993) offered a response to the women and caring debate by calling attention to the political contexts within which care is delivered. Rejecting ideas that care is related to women's morality and viewing it as a human value, she argued 'we need to…start talking instead about a care ethic that includes the values traditionally associated with women' (page 3). For her care is both a moral and political practice, as the ways it is performed, and the ways it has been institutionalised are profoundly connected to structures of power and inequality. Tronto's model of care is broad and inclusive (Hirschmann, 2018); it has links to a

“post-humanist’ perspective, which decentres the human and incorporates environmental and ecological concerns to enlarge the sense of community (Zembylas et al., 2014). Her definition of care was devised with Berenice Fisher, it states:

> ‘On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web’ (Tronto, 1993:103).

Tronto’s work (1993, 2013) on care and responsibility has implications for critical pedagogies such as the feminist pedagogy I aimed to enact in this thesis. It can enrich the transformative potentials of critical pedagogical practices by helping educators expose how power, responsibility and emotion are connected (Zembylas, et al., 2014). As I develop this chapter and discuss the narrative of care and nurture evident in the data, I will return to Joan Tronto’s ideas to support my analysis.

6.3 Safety in Small Numbers

The setting up of a feminist classroom enabled me to work with students in small groups. The three cohorts I worked with consisted of one group of six students, one group of five students, and one group of three students. Such an opportunity to work with students in small numbers is increasingly unlikely to be offered formally in higher education institutions in the UK, and globally, as the neoliberal practices guiding work in this sector promote larger class sizes as more efficient, and money saving (Preston and Aslett, 2014; Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015). Legitimising marketisation and positioning students as consumers are at the centre of the hegemonic neoliberal ideological view of education (Giroux, 2004). Thus, governmentality practices in the neoliberal university can shape teaching and learning as ‘…students are produced as self-enterprising individuals, steeped in the values of competition, and solely invested in enhancing their human capital.’ (Smith et al., 2018: 691). Tronto (2013:38) noted neoliberalism’s

implications for care stating '…from the standpoint of an ethic of care neoliberalism is a disastrous world view.' Of particular concern is neoliberalism's insidious logic of individual choice and personal responsibility that have the effect of devaluing human relationality and vulnerability. This of course has important effects in the social care and social work context. As Barnes (2011,2012) argued, devaluing care poses risks to those in need of care, further marginalising the most vulnerable. In contrast to this neoliberal logic, the majority of participants in this study valued the smaller group opportunities as a means to share, cooperate, produce better learning, gain confidence, build and nurture relationships and create a caring community. Given their career aspiration this of course can help them develop the relational sensitivities that Barnes (2018) argued is necessary in order to stem the ways care is undermined in current social policy's emphasis on personalisation.

Kimberle in an interview offered the following, when asked about how the feminist classroom differed from other learning scenarios she was experiencing whilst on her course:

> B*ecause it's been a smaller group, and it's been more relaxed, it's been a safe space, erm, you can mull things over, talk things over, yeah I think, I think, so, I think it's, you know it's more in depth.*

She also compared this to a larger group situation where she felt more nervousness about contributing, saying:

> *You'd feel stupid to say some of the things that we've said in here in front of a lecture hall. You feel, may, well, maybe no one would even bat an eyelid, but you would feel like the tension, whereby here, like I say cos it's relaxed, you don't mind saying things a bit more.*

Adrienne expressed similar feelings about the impact the group size had on her learning, and confidence to contribute, saying in a 1 to 1 interview:

> *I feel like the size of the group was of massive significance as well because when you're in a big, like being in the law lecture, there's a lot of opinions in the room at the same time isn't there? So, it's quite hard to, erm, have a good discussion I suppose cos so many people want to say something, as we had a little group, so everyone got a chance, didn't they?*

Adrienne had more to say on how she valued the feminist classroom as a better alternative to other learning scenarios. As discussed in chapter 3, I provided a range of stimulus materials to promote discussion in our feminist classroom. At one point we discussed Maya Angelou's poem entitled "Still I Rise" (Angelou, [1986] 2009). For Adrienne, its message provided resonance, she said:

> *You brought up things that would never have really been brought up in a normal session, so the poems and stuff like that, so it gives you a chance to do things differently and think about them in a different way. When you read the poem, it was like wow! I really connected to that, but in a lecture we never, I've never really done anything like that before, so I enjoyed it.*

The benefits of a small group in terms of its ability to increase comfort and promote sharing were also felt by Miriam who in an interview offered:

> *It was a kind of comfortable environment, and you know we felt safe to share the experiences, and talk more amongst ourselves and discuss things, which I don't think you can do in a classroom.*

Both Miriam and Kimberle above have referred to the idea of the feminist classroom as a safe space. Safe spaces have served as an important tactic for feminist and other social movements wishing to reduce feelings of threat and establish supportive cultures (Clark- Parsons, 2017). Spain (2016) identifies how spaces created for and by women in the 1970s and1980s, resulting from 'second wave' feminist action, provided a sense of belonging and comfort as well as opportunities to debate. Followers of feminist pedagogic principles place importance on creating classroom environments that feel safe in order to facilitate

open discussion about experiences (Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009). hooks (1990:42) referred to the 'homeplace' which has functioned as:

> '… a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination.'

Such spaces have, for Fraser (1992), operated as subaltern counter public spheres whose success relied on members' ability to carefully monitor levels of participation, and address obstacles in order to facilitate free expression. Addressing obstacles can be easier said than done however, as Kishimoto and Mwangi, (2009) also note, such spaces can be challenging for women of colour in predominantly white institutions. For teachers of colour self- disclosure can expose vulnerabilities that can make feminist classrooms unsafe.

When managed well they are a '…valuable praxical concept' (The Roestone Collective, 2014:1360), and provide 'a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance' (Kenney, 2001:24). Furthermore, Darrell et al., (2016) writing about historically Black colleges and universities, and their important contribution to social work education in the United States, stress how safe spaces are a necessary ingredient for student success. These authors claim that nurturing safe spaces can unearth students' potentials in ways that lead to genuine transformative learning.

Interestingly, five out of the six participants in cohort one came to the feminist classroom as an established group. These were five African students (four women and one man) who had already formed themselves into a group in order to offer each other support as they navigated their higher education experiences. They did not require my support to nurture them as a group. Having already found each other, they were able to support one another to resist some of the stresses involved in their studies. For example, the feeling of anonymity was expressed by Nancy in a focus group when she discussed how disappointed she was that lecturers do not remember her name:

When you come in, they're like "What's your name by the way?" And you've had the teacher, the lecturer for like three years, and I keep telling them and you get "What's, by the way, who are you by the way?" You keep wondering, and you're thinking well I'm always here, I'm always saying, "Good morning" and that sort of thing, and they're always asking, "Who are You?"

For Nancy, as an African woman, the fact that it was white lecturers who failed to remember her name was significant, and she interpreted this as an act of racism. Sharing similar concerns about navigating racism in the university, Patricia explained that she, and her African friends develop strategies such as looking at lists of tutor names when seeking who to call on for support, and deliberately avoiding any that sounded too English, as she said:

We're trying to survive.

Nancy discussed how tutors discourage students from getting to know each other by not managing group work effectively when dealing with large groups, she said:

I blame the tutors as well. You know like when you do group work and stuff, like they say join different groups, why can't they just manage to say well you go and join that group whether people like it or not. I think they should get involved as well but they just ignore it. They totally ignore it.

Nancy shared the above as she described times when groups of white students on the course created cliques that excluded Black and minority ethnic students. Patricia also shared feelings of frustration about tutor behaviour saying:

Going back to tutors, even if it is spoken about you can tell which side someone is speaking on. You sit there and you think, so many times after lectures you walk out, and you think what was that? So obviously we can't challenge it because we are scared of our grades. Within ourselves we started telling ourselves that once we challenge this, automatically it means a fail for you. You build your own ideology; you start to think if she

> *can speak like that openly in a class what would she do if she was marking my work. We are so concerned mainly about marks. The way they have spoken to us about immigration, about migrants, about Africa, about third world countries how they have no Internet.*

Nancy and Patricia's views reflect the critique of neoliberal institutions by Smith et al., (2018), who advocated using smaller class sizes, offering more support to students, and increasing face to face interactions in order to support social justice in teaching, decolonise university spaces, and foster healthier engagement between students and teachers. Their words also support the view that inequalities grow in a neoliberalised world (Rogowski, 2015).

However, returning to the discussion of safe spaces, the growth of online communities has prompted a need for renewed examinations of safe activist spaces (Clark-Parsons, 2017). The term "safe spaces" can however, be ambiguous and problematic, and has been overused yet under theorised (Barrett, 2010). This can mean it is easily co-opted. Recently, for example, concerns have been expressed that safe space concepts can be employed to limit free speech, stifle or prevent debate, meaning marginalised voices can be deterred from finding expression in them (Weale, 2018; Whitten, 2018).

As a counter to this, The Roestone Collective (2014) in their attempt to reconceptualise the concept, argue safe spaces are never completely safe, but are paradoxical.

> 'We recognize that safe spaces can offer real solutions that challenge social imaginaries, but they are far from "perfect" or universalizable, and they should not be. Accordingly, we do not attempt to construct rigid "recipes" or prescriptions for safe space… we suggest that those interested or engaged in cultivating safe spaces aim to be as intersectionally inclusive and integrated as possible, but not to avoid experimenting with exclusivity and separatism (The Roestone Collective, 2014: 1360 and 1362).

Similarly, Clark-Parsons (2017) stresses the importance of recognising the relational nature of safe spaces, and the necessity to constantly monitor proceedings in order to avoid limiting discourse and enhance participation. It is important too to note as Zhang (2018) does, that safe spaces can for some mean sanitised, and result in limiting challenging discussions, in preference for reductionist ideas about equality and diversity that perpetuate the status quo rather than change it. Zhang suggests we think about them as 'brave spaces' (page 199) in which we can have difficult conversations that can help untangle the ways that structural inequalities impact on all our lives.

For participants in this study the safe space metaphor was invoked in order to reflect its ability to promote a supportive and empowering learning community, which transformed their learning. Miriam in an interview when asked about the value of the feminist classroom we had established, in terms of her learning experiences, elaborated:

> *Because it was a smaller group maybe, it's just a bit more [pause] you could share with people, and you know you're not gonna get judged for that. We all wanted to have this space and share, which is really nice actually. I learnt a lot for just discussing it. I think sometimes I do learn more when you're talking about, you know, having somebody talking to you. You can get involved in the discussion, and it definitely helps you take it in a little bit more. Helps with the reflection.*

The small group size facilitated the development of a sense of confidence to share personal stories, from which learning ensued. Promoting a licence to share personal experiences, as a source of learning is a crucial component of feminist pedagogy, as there is a concern to '…focus on the experience of the student as a valuable resource for learning' (Coate Bignell, 1996: 315). In support of this, De Santis and Serafini (2015: 102) note, 'including personal experience as a valued source of knowledge and as a site of knowledge construction is common amongst feminist pedagogies.' These authors also note such a practice is increasingly unlikely to occur in neoliberal higher education

contexts. Chapter 2 of this thesis offers a wider discussion on how and why a focus on personal experiences is a key feature in feminist pedagogies.

Encouraging discussion by giving authenticity to personal experiences prompted some participants to break their silences, as the following extract from an interview shows:

Bell

Sharing our thoughts and opinions, and yeah, I think there's, no, you kind of don't have to think before you speak, you can just speak and know no one, [pause] it's not gonna be judged what you say

Interviewer (GM)

Right yeah

Bell

Yeah, I think it's yeah, it gives you the freedom. That freedom.

Interviewer (GM)

Right and would you say you've not, have you had that, have you felt that freedom in may be in first and second year in a similar way, or not at all or a little bit?

Bell

Probably not. No, I probably would have thought of stuff, but never have said anything. I think through these classes and stuff it's given me more confidence in wanting to voice my opinion. I think sharing our experiences has brought us all together and made us feel a lot more comfortable in sharing. Yeah definitely, and it's made me a lot closer to the girls that are in the group like me, and [gives name of another participant], she's, I've got a better friendship with her now.

Speaking up, sharing your experiences and defending your values take courage. Oliver et al., (2017) note, social work education would benefit from developing ways to support students to speak up in order for social justice obligations to be better realised. Integrating social justice and anti-oppressive perspectives into the classroom are necessary to subvert and resist neoliberal paradigms (Preston and Aslett, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015). Neoliberal discourses in higher education compel students to regulate themselves in order to conform to limited and limiting narratives of 'success', which stress a hyper individualism (Burke, 2017). This was evident in some of the quotes above, as participants revealed they felt anonymous and chose silence as a coping strategy, when in the larger classroom settings.

The impersonal nature of the neoliberal university lecture hall was described too by Kimberle in another focus group, where she compared the feminist classroom's ability to support students to speak, with a sense of alienation she felt in larger groups, she said:

> *… we're all just sitting in that faceless lecture hall, we've got like one or two friends that we talk to, and we, no one's rude to anyone else but no one's really like, we'd never spoke.* [Kimberle turns to Miriam at this point to indicate that prior to the feminist classroom, she and Miriam had never spoken to one another].

Many feminist writers have examined silence and its various meanings. For example, hooks (1994) discussed the enforced silencing of students in order to leave canonical knowledge unchallenged. For others silence can be an act of resistance, for example, Parpart (2010) suggested we should rethink voice and silence in feminist discourses, and questioned whether silences and secrecy can be legitimate, and even empowering strategies for dealing with difficult situations. In much feminist discourse the lack of a voice signifies a woman's oppression and disenfranchisement (Fisher, 2010), however, Ropers-Huilman (1996) argued powerful silences can exist and asserted that silence does not have to be viewed with suspicion. Orner (1992) advocated engaging with poststructural thought as a means to support better understanding of the multiple meanings of

communication, and as recognition that power can be expressed in a number of ways. However, for Kimberle, silence in the context she described was a negative experience as for her it signaled a sense of anonymity that disinclined people towards social interaction.

As well as producing silence, the large group sizes that participants usually found themselves in also seemed to have the effect of making some participants feel self-conscious and fear negative judgments. Bell, in the extract above, and Miriam earlier, refer to how the safe and comfortable space of the feminist classroom reassured them they would not be harshly judged. Kimberle above also talked of how a fear of feeling stupid prevented her from contributing when in the larger classes. This concern about judgement was evident in Audre too who said:

> *Among the group everybody has been friendly so far, you see nobody feels like "Who is this?" You know, everybody, we didn't look down on each other. You know, there is this aroma of love.*

Feeling looked down upon, can be one of the 'hidden injuries of the neoliberal university' (Gill, 2010:228), that feature in neoliberal educational workplaces. It connects with a sense of shame. Students' fear of speaking out as it may expose themselves as unworthy or undeserving of their place in higher education emerges regularly in research on student experiences (Burke, 2017). In addition, shame is misrecognised as detached from gendered, classed and racialised histories in the neoliberal project '…through individualizing discourses that locate the problem of pedagogical participation in the individual participant' (Burke, 2017: 430). I quoted Kimberle in chapter 4, who in her reflective journal referred to feeling shame about being a single parent as she individualised responsibility for her predicament. A comment from Patricia in a focus group also illustrated this point about shame well. We were talking about discrimination and she had shared that she sometimes believes that she discriminates against others due to her confidence, which she thinks means she is often the first to speak in group situations. Then she started to think about her own experiences of being discriminated against and said:

With all these reflections I also came to realise that we tend, due to my ethnic minority, and my skin colour, black, we tend to be ashamed to voice out that I've been discriminated. We have this shame as if it's my fault I've been discriminated, but after I realised it's not my fault. It's not acceptable. I don't have to feel embarrassed to voice out that I've been discriminated against.

As an I- poem the above utterance looks like this:

I also came to realise
I've been discriminated
I've been discriminated
I realised it's not my fault
I don't have to feel embarrassed to voice out that
I've been discriminated against.

Later she explained another reason she feels embarrassed to speak out saying:

Especially in a work environment not only am I drawing attention to my inadequacy I'm also like rocking the boat and being a trouble causer.

The feminist classroom countered and resisted this silencing and fear of challenging, as we used it as a space to give salience to structural inequalities, and their relevance to our lives, and social work and social care practices with service users. The confidence to speak up, share experiences, and reveal feelings, that the small group and safe space provided, resulted in the development of relationships, which served to further enhance the learning experience for some of the participants.

6.4 Building Relationships and Establishing a Community

For most participants in the study the opportunity to build relationships with each other, and me as teacher and researcher, was a valued benefit of the feminist classroom. The second cohort of five students established a supportive

community that continued after the research had ended. When asked about her views on the group, Audre in a 1 to 1 interview expressed:

> *It's so homely.*

Bell in her 1 to 1 interview also remarked on how supportive the group was:

> *I think sharing our experiences has brought us all together and made us feel a lot more comfortable in sharing.*

Before responding to my request to join the research, nine of the participants had never spoken to one another. This was despite sharing, in most cases, two years of being enrolled on the same full-time course. Adrienne in her 1 to 1 interview remarked about the other four participants in her cohort:

> *I'd not spoke to them; I knew all the faces. I would never have sat and had a conversation, but I do now.*

Miriam was also part of this cohort of five; she had studied with them in her first year and spent her second year abroad. She commented:

> *I think it's quite a big erm, there's quite a lot of people on the course, you don't know a lot of people, and it takes a while to kind of build that. I mean I didn't know anybody at the start of the year.*

The following extract from Kimberle and Miriam in a focus group reflects well their appreciation of the relationships and sense of belonging fostered by the feminist classroom. They were discussing how the conversations in the feminist classroom supported them to engage with social justice concepts in such a way that they could talk informatively about them in their interviews for postgraduate social work training.

> Miriam – (Talking about how she was prior to the discussions in the feminist classroom) says:

I couldn't define things.

Kimberle

Once we started talking it over with you in a safe environment, you know, it was okay to speak your mind, and you helped definitely me, I cant speak for everyone. But I, you know, I wouldn't have got the interview if it wasn't for you.

Miriam

Yeah, yeah same.

Kimberle

I felt confident. Yeah, I do know my stuff now, and I walked in and you know, I got it.

Interviewer (GM)

Did you feel confident that someone wanted to hear your experiences?

Kimberle

Yeah, someone's interested. Because we had a relationship.

Miriam

Yeah

Kimberle

We got to be with a group of people that you would never come across and you realised you've all got the same insecurities, you've all got the same, do you know what I mean?

Miriam and Interviewer (GM)

Yeah, yeah

Kimberle

That made me develop a relationship and then feel safe with them and stuff.

Miriam
Hearing other people's like experiences and you relate.

Kimberle
Yeah exactly.

Miriam

You discover more about yourself as we, like if I'd gone into that interview without this, and they'd asked me you know, "Have you ever been discriminated against?" I would have been like "No". Which would have impacted the outcome definitely.

Building community is an essential principle of feminist pedagogy (Webb et al., 2002). Feminist pedagogy aims for '…a community of learners where there is both autonomy of self and mutuality with others that is congruent with the developmental needs of both women and men' (Shrewsbury, 1997:170). To this end, feminist pedagogues restructure learning spaces to encourage a sense of community through collaboration and participatory actions (Vivakaran and Maraimalai, 2017). A shared sense of community can support the building of solidarity that is sometimes necessary for feminists. Caldwell and Hunter (2004) discuss their efforts to establish a feminist community of colour in their educational organisation. They argued that building alliances between women of colour through a shared commitment to anti-oppression can create a community

capable of resisting hegemonic messages that serve to marginalise their concerns. Talking about how the chance to share experiences created bonds Bell in a one to one interview shared:

> *I think these classes make you realise that you're not the only girl that has gone through it, girl or woman, cos we've seen through all our life shared experiences that we've experienced it in some form.*

Relationships are central to concepts of community and emphasising the significant role relationality plays in the learning process is a necessary feature of feminist pedagogy (Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015). In this context, establishing a community and supporting the building of relationships were ambitions for this project. This is antithetical to neoliberal objectives of standardisation, accountability, and the market driven metrics that defined many spaces in the establishment we were working in. As Mountz et al., (2015: 1249) claim; 'collaborative, collective models of community and solidarity work can resist neoliberal regimes and their framings of our daily lives.' The relationships and sense of community that developed in two of the cohorts I worked with facilitated the ability, and confidence to share experiences. A trusting environment is central for establishing community in feminist spaces (Schniedewind, 1993). For Adrienne in particular, this was important, and she came to trust the group, in her 1 to 1 interview she said:

> *We all had an understanding and we all knew our boundaries with each other. I knew that nothing would leave the room, so everything I was saying was just to the people sat in the room. Whereas sometimes you wouldn't want to open up if you knew that other people would then find out.*

St Germaine-Small et al., (2012) argued that the quality of the interpersonal relationships forged in classrooms lie at the heart of feminist pedagogy. In a feminist classroom, the relationships between student and teacher are as equally important as those between students. The personal connection that feminist teaching fosters (Smith-Adcock, et al., 2004) supports the development of this

relationship. Patricia commented in a focus group how the relationship we had built gave her confidence to approach me about anything, she joked:

> *Why do you think we bombard you all the time?*

For Adrienne the supportive relationship we developed helped her to deal with some feelings she had related to mental health issues she had faced in the past. She discussed them in her 1 to 1 interview. (NOTE I have included her words below in my earlier chapter 4 as I discussed creating I-poems as part of the use of the Listening Guide. I repeat it here as I am looking at it in now terms of the care and nurture narrative).

Adrienne

> *It's helped me get closure that I wasn't mad and crazy and there was something else going on as well with me.*

Later she says:

> *It's give me a belief in myself as well that I'm not who I got labelled. I'm actually me with thoughts and feelings that this has made me know that they were, I was right to feel how I was feeling cos I was being treated unfairly so it's made me feel better about myself … that I wasn't going crazy.*

Two years later when they were qualified social workers Bell and Adrienne contacted me again to express their appreciation of our work in the feminist classroom. Below are extracts from the emails they sent to me.

Adrienne:

> *Hi Geraldine,*
> *Sorry I haven't been in touch in such a long time. I have been crazy busy with my babies and my final placement.*

I thought I'd update you on where I am at.
I have passed my course, just waiting for my results on my dissertation.
I have secured a social work job with [gives name of a local authority]. I have been placed in duty and assessment, which is what I really wanted. I'm so happy!
Thanks, so much for all your help! I couldn't have done it without you.
Best wishes

Bell:

I just want to thank you ever so much for always supporting me and believing in me and my abilities. I think having the chance to take part in your PhD studies really helped me develop and understand myself better, from that it inspired me to push forward and not let things get in my path I cannot thank you enough for the confidence and determination you gave me to apply and then complete my masters and it is without that that I would not have managed to obtain my dream job, I will be eternally grateful.

I am sharing this correspondence because they indicate how the hierarchical relationship between student and teacher often seen in other classroom settings is challenged in feminist pedagogy as power is shared, community is established and members are respected (Light et al., 2015). They also reflect the power of working with an ethic of care. Tronto (1993) outlined 4 moral principles of care; these are Caring About, Taking Care of, Care-giving and Care-receiving. Later she added a fifth element, Caring with (Tronto, 2012 in Zembylas et al., 2014). These elements work to support the integrity of the caring process. Barnes (2018: 7&8) translated the first four to attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. The second element, Taking Care of, relates to responsibility and Tronto (1993: 20) links the concept of 'privileged irresponsibility' to this. This concept refers to the ways in which those granted privilege in society, ignore the hardships faced by others, and this serves to maintain their positions of privilege. My characterisation of feminist pedagogy as employed in this work helped me to avoid privileged irresponsibility. Audre's

comment below in a one to one interview can be seen to also reflect this as she describes how she felt about the feminist classroom:

> *…everybody loves you, you are approachable, so you're very approachable, you, you. I feel I come in, you're the soft type, you've got this motherly nature in you. Right. You didn't – "Oh you've got to pass it, you've got to do it this way" … because you…* [laughs]

Audre invokes a mothering discourse here, and such a connection between teaching and parenting can tend to get muddled in liberatory pedagogies (Shaw, 1995; Burke, 2017). The care evident in the approach can easily result in a rendering of it as a reflection of a mother child relationship, as this is the relationship that is often seen to epitomise care, usually in Western society and leading to romanticising about both parties (Tronto, 1993). Morley writing about the emotional costs of employing feminist pedagogy principles identified the challenging nature of facilitating student progress '…without assuming the role of surrogate mother.' (Morley, 1998:23). She was concerned too that feminist pedagogues are positioned at sites of tension created by market driven forces and:

> '…interstices of theoretical hegemonies, trying to negotiate a commitment to women's liberation, while acknowledging their authority and suspicion of grand narratives with liberatory pretensions' (page 25).

While I can appreciate Morley's warnings, in my context, Audre's words were not a concern for me. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ethic of care employed in this context supported me to avoid essentialising concepts, and I interpret Audre's comment to reflect that she has identified that I was offering an alternative way of teaching that she appreciated. Tronto (1993) is once again relevant. Her moral principles of care and inclusive definition suggest care is a human activity, and not gender specific. I think therefore of 'mothering' in terms of care, not as a gendered activity. Cree (2012) discussed her work with African students and reported how aghast she was initially when a student asked if he could call her his mother. On reflection, she came to see this as a reflection of

how a family and community focus is more central in African paradigms, rather than a crossing of professional boundaries. Audre is a Nigerian woman and often addresses me as Ma, like Viviene Cree, I have come to realise that: ' 'Ma' or 'mother' is someone who looks after you, but more than this, looks *out* for you' (Cree, 2012: 456).

Audre's use of the word 'soft' above, is interesting too as notions of caring teaching have been used in neoliberal deficit discourses that decry the so called "dumbing down" and feminisation of higher education. Such discourse can have the effect of presenting students in higher education from previously under - represented backgrounds as misplaced, whilst it also '… legitimizes forms of pedagogic practice associated with 'hard' and 'tough' dispositions, as forms of pedagogical practice associated with 'elite' HE' (Burke, 2017: 437).

Establishing supportive relationships amongst students, and between teacher and students are key goals of feminist pedagogy, however, they are not always achievable. With the third cohort of students I worked with in this project I was unable to form a community. Hence, I have no contributions from this cohort in relation to the care and nurture narrative I am discussing in this chapter. The three students that formed this cohort did not come to value the feminist classroom or the opportunities to build relationships with one another. As others have noted (Morley, 1998; Markowitz, 2005; Titus, 2010; Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009; Lawson, 2011), not all students want to be involved in a feminist classroom. From the beginning I struggled to get participants for this cohort, as discussed in chapter 3, so, when I got interest from just three students, I pursued the project despite the lack of interest, and my concerns about the number of students.

There are many reasons why students might not be interested in joining a feminist classroom. For example, Crabtree and Sapp (2003) note that a student's lack of experience in democratic dialogue might prevent participation. Sharp et al., (2007) identify that acknowledging inequalities can be painful as it can involve challenging long held beliefs, and students are not always ready for that. In a similar vein, Langan and Davidson (2005) report how disrupting

dominant discourses can lead to student anger. Additionally, avoidance, denial and resentment can be student responses to critical analysis (Markowitz, 2005).

In the context of this thesis, I do not believe any of the above was particularly evident in my work with this cohort. Two of the three students were heavily invested in their own concerns. One of these was instrumental about the project, and after my support secured her an offer of a place on a postgraduate social work course, her interest in engaging with the project dwindled. Another decided to delay applying for social work training, and so again, interest in attending meetings in the feminist classroom became less of a priority for her. Only Rosalind attended all of the scheduled meetings. Rosalind was steadfast in her commitment, and we established a pleasant relationship that I valued, however, Rosalind did not share any views on this in interviews or in her reflective journal.

Once again, I can turn to a discussion about neoliberalism as I examine this experience. The other two students performed in this context as neoliberal subjects do, '…as atomised individuals in an undemocratic world…' (Singh, 2015:15). As Lipton and Mackinlay, (2017:65) note 'neoliberal socialisation erodes the notion of collective responsibility and our individual responsibility to others'. I understand the students' approach; they are entangled in neoliberal higher education forces and practices, as I am too. Such practices and forces encouraged them to see themselves as individuals entirely responsible for their own self-management and performance. My experiences with this cohort have reminded me of the need to accept what DeLaet (2012) refers to as the messiness and uncertainty of feminist pedagogy. This experience also strengthened my resolve to resist neoliberalism's hold and pursue my counter-hegemonic goals for this project. One of those goals was to imbue in students the importance of care and nurture as values in work with service users in social care and social work contexts. Fortunately, despite some difficulties, I was able to attain data that represented how they were developing an increasing sense of empathy and understanding of service users' lives and circumstances. I will discuss this in the next section of this chapter.

6.5 Empathy with Service Users

Engendering in students a clear sense that as future social work/care professionals they will work in a supportive and collaborative way with service users was also a key aim of the feminist space in which we worked. Partnership and collaborative work with service users in social work and social care supports the development of practice that enables respectful and meaningful relationships between service users and workers (Gosling and Martin, 2012), as well as enhancing service users' involvement in all aspects of the work (Barnes and Cotterell, 2012). Many social work writers lament how neoliberal regimes' dominance in public services such as social work and social care are changing workers' practice from one focused on care and meeting needs, to one that centralises concepts such as risk, managerialism, self-regulation and resilience, in ways that serve to deny structural inequalities and discourage collective responses (Kemshall, 2002,2009; Webb, 2006; Turner and Colombo, 2008; Stanford, 2010; Rogowski, 2013). There are efforts to counter this '…neoliberal transformation of social work' (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013:12) and establish more spaces for critical and radical discourses in the profession. It is my hope that my feminist classroom is such a space.

The critical approach that feminist pedagogy is imbued with aims to advance equality within and beyond the academy (De Welde et al., 2013). In this context, the changes I had hoped to promote were in the context of students' current and future practice with service users. Feminist pedagogy can support this as it:

> '… offers students ways to analyse practices such as sexism, racism, and class exploitation that structure and mediate human encounters in everyday life' (Crabtree and Sapp, 2003: 132).

In the feminist classroom, students and I relished opportunities to share understandings about inequalities and discuss the meanings of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices in work with service users.

In a focus group meeting, Miriam and Kimberle discussed how much they valued the opportunity the feminist classroom provided to explore in more depth these important concepts. When I asked about whether they felt their current higher

education studies had so far supported and developed their understandings, the following was expressed:

Miriam

I don't think they emphasised it enough on the course

Kimberle

Yeah, I think it was like what they did was they taught us all the stuff but we never really got it, you never really got this polish. You know you give me a bit of silver, you helped us like polish it, you know what I mean?

Interviewer (GM)

Yeah

Kimberle

It was like you helped. I don't know cos we had all these things running around and we were never really sure.

Dialogues in the safe and secure space of the feminist classroom supported Miriam, Kimberle and other participants to develop a more critical awareness of inequalities, what Kimberle called 'a polish' (above). Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) assert that working toward critical consciousness is an effective way to support learning about and developing skills for anti-oppressive practices.
Preston and Aslett (2014: 502) also advocate what they call an 'activist pedagogy', as the best way to subvert and resist neoliberalism's hold on social work education's practices, and properly support student understanding of anti-oppressive perspectives. Their activist pedagogy has much in common with the feminist pedagogy that guided my hand though this project. Indeed, many social justice-oriented perspectives coalesce around the concept of anti-oppressive practice (Brown, 2012).

Through dialogue we were able to explore our own and others' understandings of discrimination and use it to develop empathy. Working in a connected and relational way enabled empathy to develop so work with service users could be more beneficial for all parties. Adrienne in a focus group discussed her growing empathy when she said:

> *I actually did that when I went on [gives the name of an organisation], a lot of them did not have jobs and they were living on benefits and was off taking drugs and I couldn't realise why they wouldn't want to get a job and get self-esteem…you know when I realised a lot more has happened to them than meets the eye, they have been discriminated against, and oppressed, so why wouldn't they act the way they act, cos they can't get anywhere, can't get on the housing ladder, so, there's lots more things involved than what you're just looking at really.*

Adrienne's previous inclinations reflect what Burke (2017:433) called:

> '… deficit perspectives that place the responsibility on those individuals who are identified as at risk of exclusion through their lack of aspiration, confidence, adaptability or resilience**.'**

Our feminist space supported her to alter these perceptions. It facilitated opportunities to reflect on challenging concepts and create transformative learning. We recognised it as a politicised and contextualised space, and from that basis we were able to grow our understandings. Such meaningful dialogue about complex political subject matter is hindered in neoliberal organisations when students are viewed as consumers (Servage, 2009). In social work and social care education, anti-oppression and anti-discrimination discussions require a critical pedagogy that reduces student alienation, apathy and isolation (Preston and Aslett, 2014). This then can support the development of empathy that is necessary for effective work with service users. Developing our capacity for empathy can be achieved through feminist pedagogies that recognise difference (Burke, 2017). Miriam commented on this in a 1 to1 interview:

I think it does makes you think about it more when you can reflect and see in your own life what you've been through and it's not that bad, and then you think about what they've been through. It definitely makes you more empathetic and you're able to understand a little bit more, and I think that helps them as well. Because they know that you know what it's been like for them or at least have an understanding.

She reinforced this in her reflective journal when she wrote:

The discrimination I have been subjected to in my life is nothing in comparison to the service users I will come into contact with if I qualify as a social worker. However, these discussions have allowed me to reflect on my own experiences, consequently giving me a greater understanding of how service users feel about themselves and society.

Audre also shared the following in her 1 to 1 interview:

Because I've been there, I know how it feels emotionally,
so, I pick it up from there and try and listen more, and just imagine whatever the service user is feeling. The emotional stress and mental stress and that will kind of want to give me more insight into the story and understand it better and better.

The following extract from a focus group is another good illustration of this. This were the replies I received after I asked a question about whether or not our discussions had supported better understanding of inequalities in service users' lives

Audre

Yes

Bell

Yeah

Interviewer (GM)

Okay, yeah and…?

Adrienne

Them poems really affected me [laughs]. The poems that we read. I really liked them

Interviewer (GM)

Right so did you feel connection with the, with Maya Angelou and Andre Lorde?

Adrienne

They just made me realise that other people have problems, just worse than. So, if they can get through it, everyone can, can't they? Especially women.

Miriam

I think if like you can compare it to your own situation as well, like you can see somebody's situation is lot worse than your but if you've got an idea of what's happened to you, even if it's like a small thing, you identify with people a bit more, and be…

Kimberle: (Interrupts)

Be empathetic.

Miriam

Yeah

Kimberle

Because it's erm, not about judging them, erm you know, it's about seeing why they are, you know, maybe they're behaving in a certain way that you find isn't right, but then you've got to look beyond that and see what's happening in their lives to cause them to behave like that, so you're not judging them, you know, you've got to look at the big, holistically, look at the situation.

This conversation developed into an examination of the situations the students had come across on placements in social care settings. They shared a few incidents and cited experiences of certain service users. It culminated in the following from Kimberle:

Well I think within, obviously if you're to go into social work, empathy, so that's so, I think it's definitely taught me empathy

Tronto's (1993) work once again has resonance as I analyse this narrative. As Zembylas et al., (2014) note, engaging with her ethic of care ideas can support understanding of how we care for marginalised members of society. Social care and social work service users are part of these marginalised groups. The ethic of care evident in how we operated our feminist classroom served to support the development of empathy that Kimberle refers to above. An ethic of care as discussed by Tronto (1993, 2013) and Sevenhuijsen, (1998) recognises that at some point in our lives we are all receivers of care, in so doing it encourages empathy.

6.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the data from my study that was evidence of a narrative of “Care and Nurture”. In the context of this study, this narrative is particularly prominent. The students/participants I worked with in the feminist classroom had career aspirations in the direction of social work and social care. Many of my ambitions for the project were related to supporting them in this endeavour and fostering in them an approach to this work that gave emphasis to the social justice mandates of the social work profession. The increasing sense of empathy with service users that developed from our discussions in the feminist classroom will undoubtedly be beneficial in students’ interactions with service users.

Supporting students to develop insights into the structural inequalities service users and others face is difficult in many current educational contexts where concerns about quality expressed in neoliberal language push equality concepts to the margins (Archer and Francis, 2007; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; Rogowski, 2012,2014a, 2014b, 2015; Fenton, 2018). In addition, working with a feminist ethic of care and applying feminist pedagogical principles is not easy in a neoliberal context. However, it can be a means of resistance and a way to subvert and counter the neoliberal elements in the institution. As this chapter has illustrated, many participants in this study welcomed the feminist classroom as a more caring alternative to their other learning spaces. It was a nurturing space, which celebrated relationality, and as such was much appreciated by all members. It encouraged a sense of community as it contradicted the individualising discourses evident in other learning spaces. For Stanger (2018) such discourses are unjust, as students are positioned within narrow ideas of success based on individual worth.

However, it has to be noted that the data presented here is predominantly from one cohort in the study. This cohort were able to embody many of the aims of this project and all five students were extremely generous with their time and showed great commitment to the project. They were fully aware of the benefits they received from their participation. They welcomed the opportunity to form a close community of learners and supported one another to make this a success. The relationships they built amongst themselves continued after the project

ended. An opportunity to present some of our work at an academic conference arose, so we worked together to produce a paper. This experience served as a further bonding opportunity as well as giving the students the chance to build confidence in academic spaces that would benefit them in their postgraduate studies.

Of the other two cohorts, one was already a community. They were a group of African students who had already formed strong bonds with one another and established supportive strategies. Indeed, they came to my project as a group as collectively they could see the potential benefits of the support being offered by the feminist classroom. They offered each other support, and this demonstrates that the teacher is not always necessary as an enabler; students can initiate their own support systems. Impressed by their bond and the support they were offering each other; I did not explore with them the value of small group work and interaction. This is a limitation of the study and I will discuss it further in my concluding discussion for this thesis. The third cohort unfortunately, was not able to enjoy the experience of being part of caring and nurturing place. I was not able to facilitate it. My experience with this group is further evidence that work grounded in an ethic of care, and promoting equity and inclusion are what Burke (2017: 441) describes as '…problematic aspirations that require ongoing, reciprocal and reflexive forms of critical consideration.' I have discussed this feature of the third cohort in chapter 3, where I discuss the problems I faced when recruiting participants for this study.

Despite this, I strongly believe that creating caring and nurturing learning spaces are worthwhile ambitions. I have demonstrated in this chapter how Tronto's (1993, 2013) notions of an ethic of care have relevance to feminist and critical pedagogies. Employing her approach challenges narrow ideas about care that have been easily co-opted by neoliberal discourses. Care is a commodity in neoliberal agendas, and ethic of care principles are necessary in order to resist this and ensure justice for both care givers and care receivers (Barnes, 2018). I view working towards such aims as acts of resistance and defiance. My views chime with Mountz et al., (2015: 1239) who argue:

> '… cultivating space to care for ourselves, our colleagues, and our students is, in fact, a political activity when we are situated in institutions that devalue and militate against such relations and practices.'

Such acts of resistance are necessary and were evident too in participants' stories as the next chapter demonstrates.

Chapter 7 - Resistance and Defiance

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This final results chapter discusses the third overarching narrative evident in the data, which I have termed 'Resistance and Defiance'. Ford et al., (2008: 371) argue that actions become viewed as resistance after 'change agents assign the label resistance to them as part of their sense making.' Thus, I have assigned this label as a way to reflect stories participants shared in which they tell about the myriad ways they refused to accept being placed at a disadvantage as a result of gender, class, race or other axes of structural inequalities. Their disinclination towards acceptance of perceived injustices translated at times into bold disobedience as they demonstrated defiance towards discriminatory practices. Resistance takes different forms, but whatever form it takes, it imposes limits on power (Barbalet, 1985; Armstrong and Murphy, 2011). It is generally defined as a 'response to unequal power relationships and social inequality' (Talavera-Bustillos and Solorzano, 2012: 1856). Discussions about resistance often mobilise Foucault's concepts, as his ideas explore the subtle ways power operates (Foucault, 1984, 1988). The possibilities of resistance have always been present in Foucault's interpretations, as resistance is always implied where there is power (Dumm, 1996). Foucault did not intend to portray individuals as passive and without power:

> 'The idea that power is a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom cannot be attributed to me' (Foucault 1984:442).

The feminist classroom we worked in for this research supported some to better recognise inequalities and have confidence to resist and defy them both on their own behalf, and on the behalf of others, including service users in work in a social care/work context. Some had already been emboldened in this direction, and the feminist classroom was used as a space to share these stories and be affirmed in these actions. Such affirmations supported the development of relationships, and a sense of community amongst participants as discussed in

the previous chapter. In this chapter I discuss how through making individual stands participants resisted being discriminated against, and how some of them took this defiance into other situations and used it to support others in their efforts to resist discrimination. Their stories have been explored with reference to ideas in the literature about resistance and defiance, and as with the previous two narratives, feminist pedagogical concepts have once again been employed to analyse the data.

7.2 Making an individual stand – defying the status quo through everyday resistance

The concept of everyday resistance was discussed by Scott (1985, 1989, 1990) as a form of rebellion that is less visible and dramatic than organised, collective public demonstrations of defiance. 'Everyday resistance is about how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power' (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:2). The following contribution from Audre in a focus group reflects this form of resistance:

> *Men tend to bring down women "Oh come on what do you know?" Which can be upsetting, and I think it's out of that people, women try to fight for themselves. I think it's more of an individual thing, experience like they said in the lecture, your personal experience because when you get, you have a potential of doing something, and someone is just trying to shut you up, and put you down and say "Oh stay in your place, you can't do this and you can't do that", then it turns into something else, and that's when you start striving and "Oh I just have to", and that's when so many women want to go into education, because education is power. My mum was illiterate, she never went to school, so I'm like "Oh God for that, for that she's an illiterate". I would make sure I go to school. There would be a massive difference by the time I produce children, my own children would see me from another perspective. If my mum had gone to school things would have been a lot better. She's a woman, they were marginalised, they didn't know their rights, they were abused, they felt it as a cultural thing, you know?*

Audre relates a story that reflects a silent or invisible resistance, as she discussed how she witnessed discrimination, and from that resolved to avoid it by looking for alternatives, in her case education. The following I-poem generated from the above indicates how she personalised this experience:

I think it's more of an individual thing
I just have to
I would make sure I go to school

Her claim that it is an individual thing, can be seen to show the influence of neoliberal dogma resulting in tendencies to reduce or elide the effects of structural and systemic inequalities in preference for a discourse that exaggerates individual agency (Mohanty, 2013; Singh, 2015; Baer, 2016; Fenton, 2018; Zhang, 2018). However, the effects of wider structural systems are also recognised as she discusses her mother's experience. The fourth listening as I followed the steps of the Listening Guide (discussed in chapter 4) enabled this realisation. This listening requires attention to how relationships to wider social and structural factors are talked about.

Audre developed this theme at a later stage of the focus group as she discussed her upbringing and family again saying:

> *Like my brother, my mum had an only son, and he was over pampered. He had everything at our own cost so she was less concerned about us, the daughters, but the son was over spoilt and at the end of it now I wouldn't say he's become, he's not useful to himself anymore. But indirectly she didn't know she was empowering us because her attitude towards us kind of made us daughters very very independent. Even my partner at the moment at home, he sees me a bit competitive. The man I'm married to. He's forgotten the way I grew up. I grew up to be independent so I've always had it even if my husband becomes a millionaire, I will make my own money because there's dignity in it.*

Using a narrative of resistance and defiance supported Audre towards a sense of pride and dignity as she discussed how she disputed the gender inequalities she witnessed in both personal and wider contexts. As a Black woman who has experienced modern slavery, her sense of self-esteem and self-respect was important to her.

> 'Modern slavery is defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation' (Such et al., 2017: online).

The dehumanising effect of such an experience (O'Connell Davidson, 2015), which was part of Audre's history, took time for her to overcome, and so presenting herself as a resister and in defiance was important to her. Audre used her reflective journal to share some of this story and she wrote about feeling powerless and helpless. She revealed that when she first came to England, she worked for another African family who required her to work from 5.30am until midnight, seven days a week. This situation persisted for just over two years. Her efforts to confront the woman who headed the family she worked for as a housekeeper, were mostly in vain, yet she did confront her on many occasions, asking for time off, and clarification about her rights. The family kept her passport and refused to register her with a doctor or let her open a bank account. Eventually with support from someone in her church Audre was able to threaten the family with the police and this meant they released her from her contract with them and gave her back her documents. Her actions reflect Katz's (2004) claim that resistance is a response that aims to subvert or disrupt exploitative conditions. These circumstances make the following I-poem, generated from an interview transcript, when she responded to a question about whether or not the feminist classroom had benefitted her, with this context the poem seems all the more powerful:

> *I now know I am being empowered*
> *Now I know my rights*
> *I know I've got the qualities to be what it takes*

I can face up to any challenges
It has empowered me
It has empowered me
I feel more independent now
I've been there
I know how it feels emotionally
I won't be scared
I won't be stoned to death
I've always stood up for myself

Feminist pedagogy is 'predicated on ideas about empowering individuals' (Crabtree et al., 2009: 4) and it would seem from Audre's I-poem above this has been achieved in this instance. Of course, as discussed in chapter 2, notions of empowering classrooms have been a source of contention, at times serving to falsely bestow heroic qualities on teachers (Ellsworth, 1989; Orner, 1992). As a concept it requires the application of a critical lens in order to acknowledge this important debate. However, in this circumstance Audre has invoked it to show how much she feels she has gained from participating in the feminist classroom. She was possibly the most enthusiastic of all participants, often coming to sessions straight after a night shift as part of her work as a mental health carer. Our relationship continues as it has developed into a friendship, again acknowledging Letherby's (2003) claim that working in a feminist perspective requires recognition that engagements do not necessarily end when the research does. This is also reflective of Rizvi's (2019) view that feminist researchers should seek to make differences to the lives of women, as I have been able to support Audre in a number of practical ways as she has navigated the United Kingdom higher education system. Additionally, her support for this project has been a crucial motivator for me. Our continuing relationship has enabled opportunities for joint reflexivity, and as Burman (2006) argues, this can enhance the power of a project, making it more rigorous in its reflexivity as it supports us to challenge in more meaningful ways our narrative positions as researchers.

Audre was not alone in sharing personal experiences of resistance and defiance. Lynn described an incident at work where a white co-worker behaved in what she

believed was a racist way. She brought the incident to the attention of a manager. Lynn acknowledged how discussions in the feminist classroom supported her to challenge the behaviour, she said:

> *I went straight to the manager, I said, "Look here, I have discovered this, and this, during our lunch so I think this is discrimination" The manager said "No I'm so sorry don't take it this way because we have got policies". I said, "Why is it only directed to me, not other people?" I said, "Okay I understand because you say sorry, I accept you're sorry." I just accepted it.*
>
> *Interviewer GM*
>
> *Do you think our conversations sharpened your antennae to spot it, and have confidence to challenge?*
>
> *Lynn*
>
> *It really raised my awareness because I recognised it, and I managed even to stand up to it, and I even notified them that next time if you do it to a different person I will take it further and then you'll be in trouble. Don't ever do it.*

Like Audre, Lynn reported this with a sense of pride and shared it in a group setting in which others were then prompted to offer similar stories. Nancy reported that during her work in a woman's refuge, a white female colleague enquired about how rape and sexual abuse are perceived in African countries such as the one Nancy is from. Nancy said:

> *I said well you know coming into this country has kind of highlighted to me issues that need to be addressed back home. If I were to go I'd probably offer a helpline for people because in marriages where I come from if a husband wants to have, to be intimate with, have sex with a wife, if the wife doesn't want to at that moment they can force it upon them. Because*

it's his, it's her husband she probably like accepts it. I said people don't know its abuse. I would want to go and educate people that you know you shouldn't allow this to happen; you shouldn't allow husbands to abuse you. So, she misconstrued what I said and reported me so say to the manager that my views on rape and abuse are totally different to the views we have at work with vulnerable clients.

As a result of being reported Nancy found that she was not offered shifts and so confronted the manager:

I said, "Well that's not fair. I feel really oppressed you are making a decision over hearsay. You've not even asked me what happened, and you've already made the decision to say well I'm not having any work." She said, "Well we've informed HR". They'd gone that far, and I'm like "No I'm not happy". She went on to say, "Are you able to come to see me?" I said, "I can come in now. I totally disagree with what she's told you and I will repeat what I said to you in front of her." If it wasn't for the conversations we'd had, that helped me as I did challenge it, and eventually she even had to say, "Well you can fill in the time sheet for the shifts you've missed out on."

Nancy and Lynn recognised their treatment as resulting from racism and resisted being treated in such a way. Sharing their stories in the way they do resonates with hooks (1989:21) who wrote about how 'racism empowers white women to act as exploiters and oppressors.' Lorde ([1984], 2007) too has relevance here in terms of her call for Black women to voice their concerns and challenge racism. Collins (1991) discussed how Black women's experiences are routinely distorted, Nancy's story above, would support this claim. This distorting subjugates the knowledge and is one reason Collins (1991, 2000) argues for a Black women's standpoint. Both Lynn and Nancy show a form of resistance that Riessman (2000: 130) would see as 'taking a stand in an interaction (speaking out and acting up)'. Such resistance reflects their agency as they grapple with being positioned in subordinate roles by seeking ways to resist (Davis and Fisher, 1993).

Strategic avoidance is according to Riessman (2000) another form of everyday resistance and involves purposefully avoiding a confrontation. This was evident when Rosalind in a focus group told of how her husband makes most decisions in their house, his decision is always final, and she defers to him about all household matters. She said that she does not always like this situation, but she accepts it and says nothing:

> *For peace. To rest it.*

Later she explains:

> *I don't know other cultures, but in my own culture it is the woman that will serve the man the food. If the woman is not around the man will wait until the wife can come back and serve. Sometimes I don't like it because if he was as at home now and I am at work he would wait for me to come and serve him. I accept it.*

Rosalind is an African woman who sees silence as a useful strategy. Gatwiri and Mumbi (2016) when discussing African women's responses to oppressive actions, assert that the common belief that disempowerment is signalled by silence is a Western feminist discourse, and is not always accurate or relevant to contexts other than the West. They assert that silence can be used tactfully to bargain with patriarchy in a non-confrontational way.

Nancy in another focus group also discussed how resistance does not always have to be expressed openly when she said:

> *I think I remember there was a woman who came to give us a talk about one agency and she was talking about the people they employ, and apparently they don't employ Black workers, and we did ask her, we said why don't you employ Black carers, she said well their clients, they don't like Black carers at all. So, they have to do what the clients want, so personally I always have in my mind well why should I even challenge it when I know we're not even wanted, you know. There's no point because*

we're not going to win it anyway. So, if somebody doesn't want you to care for them because of your colour of your skin what can you do about it? You can't. They're paying the money, aren't they?

Nancy judged that her response was a necessary tactic, perhaps to help her avoid openly challenging a dominant ideology. Sometimes such challenges develop better in spaces where consciousness can develop (Collins, 1991) such as in a feminist classroom. The response to Nancy's words from Sharlene below is a reflection of participants' growing confidence to challenge injustices; and our feminist space facilitated their expression:

I thought that since we are in social care, you know a profession, especially for that lady, she knows exactly that we have got diversity in this country she should make sure that whenever she is talking to the service users or checking contracts or something they should tell them that within our organisation we do have Black carers, we have Asian carers so that those service users should know that they can get anybody. I think they are actually encouraging them by not taking other people in their organisation. So they are actually encouraging you know racism in their organisation, because they are not dealing with it. It is not right.

Sharlene's insight here reflects a sophisticated understanding of how easy it is to embed racism in practice, and how the absence of a critical lens supports such actions. The deep learning, she shows here that can be generated in critical classroom spaces can be unsettling, '…fraught with tension, emotion and trepidation' (Wagner, 2005: 263). These are spaces where both students and teachers can face anxiety and discomfort (Smith et al., 2018). Some of the above stories were uncomfortable for me to hear, and I am sure the telling of them also generated some discomfort. However, it is necessary to engage with such emotions, especially during social work and social care education. The centrality of social justice to the practice of social work means:

> ‘Social work students, regardless of their multiple social identities in oppressed and oppressor groups, are called upon to take action against social injustice’ (Gibson, 2014: 199).

Making a stand to resist discrimination of a different sort was part of Adrienne’s narrative too. Adrienne discussed how she resisted the labels of “mad” and “crazy”. I have presented her I-poem reflecting this in chapter 4, as I discussed generating I-poems from the transcripts as I worked through the Listening Guide. I will reproduce it here as it has relevance too to this narrative:

I wasn’t mad and crazy
I feel
I’m not who I got labelled
I’m actually me with thoughts and feelings
I was right to feel how I was feeling
I was being treated unfairly.

Through this expression, Adrienne shows a form of resistance that Riessman (2000) referred to as resistant thinking, she is holding her ground, and refusing to accept a deviant label. Psychiatric labels hold significant power; Goffman’s (1963) work on stigma is often cited as an example of this. However, as Riessman (2000) discussed, the power of dominant stigmas can be resisted to produce transformative effects that can rearrange power relations. Foucault’s (1988:16) ‘technologies of the self’ concept has relevance too, as it is through these that resistance possibilities can be located at the level of an individual’s daily life. Michel Foucault discussed how power is not with the individual, it exists in relations, such that the possibility of resistance is always present, if it was not, there would be no power relations (St Pierre, 2000). Resisting the damaging effects of stigma can involve employing many strategies that may initially be viewed as disempowering, but can in fact be enabling (Frederick, 2017). Adrienne has resisted and defied attempts by a psychiatrist to impose gender stereotypes about mental ill health on her, as the following exchange from a one to one interview demonstrates:

Interviewer (GM)

You can correct me if I am remembering it incorrectly, but I recall you telling me that the psychiatrist was almost like willing you to get well for the sake of your boyfriend, not for the sake of you

Adrienne

Yeah, for my relationship.

Interviewer (GM)

Your responsibilities as a girlfriend were not being fulfilled

Adrienne

Yeah honestly, that is how I felt the whole time. I was sat in a room with him the whole time and I said to him, I feel like I need a break from the relationship, cos I couldn't cope with my own responsibilities, never mind the responsibilities that we had together, and he said to me you shouldn't be making irrational decisions while you're not well. But is that really irrational, wanting some space apart so that you didn't have to cope with the pressures of being a girlfriend, and a housewife, and looking after someone else as well as a baby? When I think back, I probably would have got better quickly if I was on my own. He found that a really irrational decision to make'

Adrienne's extract above was shared in the context of her discussing how she felt she had been discriminated against by services she was seeking support from for her mental health challenges. She believed that stereotypical ideas about gender, and women's place in heterosexual relationships, held by the psychiatrist led him to give precedence to her boyfriend's needs over her needs. Later in the same interview, she says the following:

Adrienne

Well my social worker was a female, and I think she was a lesbian; she was so good with me. Then I think it is because she was a lesbian, so she understood women more, I'm not like thingy, you know what I mean like? She doesn't have a male in her life that tells her all his opinions

Interviewer (GM)

Right

Adrienne

Me and my boyfriend argue like crazy, cos he has a really male perspective on things, and she doesn't have that influence, do you know what I mean, by a man in the household? And she was really really, she never judged me, not, and I took an overdose, so if you read that on a piece of paper you think "Oh bleeding hell, this is gonna be a difficult one." She never judged me. She come into the house, she had to check over me, and she done it so sensitively, I thought a man could never have done that, and when she left the house I felt good.

Interviewer (GM)

Yeah

Adrienne

How often would you get that off a social worker, leaving your house? But I felt good, like she'd empowered me I suppose, she'd told me "You're not a bad mother, you're just a mother having a bad time and that is why we're here, cos you're having a hard time."

Interviewer (GM)

Good

Adrienne

And she was the only person out of all my care that I felt did a good job.

Adrienne's comments here reflect how she was supported to think differently about her experiences. Reframing (transform meaning), refocusing (highlight more positive features of a situation), and recalibrating (give more weight to some aspects than others) can be effective ways to resist negative stigmatisation, and maintain a positive sense of identity and self-esteem (O'Donnell et al., 2011). Adrienne forged an effective working relationship with her social worker. This relationship, she believed, supported her resistance and defiance, and encouraged her to seek to offer a similar service to others in her future role as a social worker.

Adrienne was not alone in her desire to use her own experiences to support others to resist and defy inequalities, as the next section of this chapter indicates.

7.3 Supporting others through resistance and defiance

Speaking up, out and with, in order to challenge power is crucial for social work, and this is an area where there is often contention. An existential question for social work as a profession, asks is social work about giving assistance or is it more than that, is it about challenging the way society is set up and the ways in which power operates? The IFSW (2019) definition of social work, which I have cited in chapter 2, suggests the latter of these. Hardy (2016) reports that Silvana Martinez, the regional president for the International Federation of Social Workers, argued that challenging social injustices is at the heart of social work and this requires speaking about power and social inequalities. Reynaert et al., (2019) insist that to fully prepare future social workers for their it is necessary to give human rights an explicit place in social work education's curricula. Doing so they argue goes some way to resisting the impact of neoliberal agendas. Hardy (2016: onine) presented the following assertion from a social worker:

> ‘We can either roll over and not assert our identity, or we can speak up for ourselves and speak up for the clients that we serve, for the clients that we aim to bring justice and dignity to.’

Resistance and defiance are evident in this assertion, yet many social work writers lament the absence of resistance to neoliberal dogma social work that has the effect of individualising problems, and minimising structural analysis (Rogowski, 2012; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; Rogowski, 2014; Fenton, 2016; Fenton, 2018). I share this concern, and as stated already, the research reported here includes an aim to address this. Our work in the feminist classroom supported students to see the value in resistance and employing it on behalf of others. Bell in a one to one interview, reported how she took a stand (Riessman, 2000), when she witnessed a female receptionist at her workplace feeling upset by sexist and racist attitudes. The receptionist was a young Romanian woman whose authority was repeatedly undermined by white males who use the building. She felt unable to resist this, but Bell took it up on herself to report this. The following is an I-poem generated from Bell’s story that neatly reflects her unwillingness to accept perceived inequalities:

> *I’ve had to get my manager*
> *I’ve had to take it up with my manager*
> *I’ve experienced it as well*
> *I’ll say something back to them*
> *I took it up with my manager*
> *I said to him it’s not really on*

Bell’s words reflect agency, ‘…the ability to act to shape one’s own life, to resist victimization, and to improve the communities and societies in which we live’ (Briskin, 2015:59). Adrienne’s increasing sense of agency is evident in her contributions below offered in a one to one interview:

> *Yeah that was what happened with my partner like. I thought oh that’s what men do, and this is what women do, so I’ll just have to get on with it.*

Then I realised like that's not what men do, and my job isn't what women do.

Later when discussing inequalities more generally she said:

When I have come across inequalities I just accepted it before as life, and now I realise that its actually unfair…well I wouldn't allow it to happen again, so if the next time when I see it, I don't know how to put it, I'd stop it before it got too far so that it wouldn't become an inequality.

Similarly, Audre considered her own experiences, and how resisting the oppressive effects of modern slavery would position her well in working with vulnerable service users. She noted in her reflective diary:

This experience played a key role in my wishes to become a social worker, the experience will give a context and meaning to my decision-making and it will serve as a constant reminder of why I am a social worker. I had been a victim of oppression and have gained an understanding into moments of real life and real struggles.

Rosalind and Lena were also able to demonstrate growing realisation of the need to challenge discrimination. Rosalind shared a story about how when she was on placement, she witnessed a colleague dismiss a man seeking shelter. Feeling this was unfair she alerted another colleague to the man's situation, and he was offered accommodation. She explained:

Talking about discrimination gives us maybe ability to understand what it is all about and to tackle it whenever it comes in our life.

Later the conversation moved on to thinking about the social work role and she said:

Most of the social work job is just to fight injustice, fight injustice that is within this society because they deal with the underprivileged, groups who

can't even speak for their own, fight for themselves. Even naturally even if not a social worker I like to fight against it.

Lena developed this saying:

It's something that even if you're not in a social care or a social work setting, it's something that everyone when they're outside if someone's discriminating someone or calling them a type of name, you naturally, for me or anyway, I would be like that's wrong, regardless of their colour, their faith you just shouldn't say certain things.

Concern to counter discriminatory behaviours was also expressed by Bell in a one to one interview. She described how unacceptable she finds negative attitudes to disability as she discussed being in a public place with service users and witnessing some insensitivity by members of the public:

I've noticed people not being very receptive and being quite, I don't know, it really got my back up, cos it just made me think we're in the twenty first century and you shouldn't be behaving like that. It, you should be accepted now, that people have got disabilities, but they can still go into the community, and they can do things that we can do, and I've noticed people, you, just not behaving in a very nice way… it's made me want to challenge those perceptions and speak to people and change their perceptions, cos they need to get over it. It's made me want to leave my job that I'm in now, and work there permanently I've applied for a job, hope I get it.

Cary, an African man, and the only male participant in the study, spoke in a focus group about how opportunities in the feminist classroom to share his own experiences of discrimination emboldened him for speaking up for himself, and then on behalf of and with service users saying:

Our conversations were useful as I was able to tell how I experience discrimination. At first, I was not looking at my own, so it benefitted me. I

have learnt to complain so that erm, those people know that I was not feeling okay.

Later he added:

I came to realise that if you are able to stand up for your own, when you are being discriminated against, then you will be able to stand for other people. But if you, because, before I was a bit scared to mention it, and even if I saw it being done to other people I was not [pause] having that confidence to talk about it or challenge it, but when we talked the way how I experienced it, now I can challenge when I see somebody do this to other people.

Feeling empowered to object to discriminatory practices was something that Lena also shared in a focus group, saying:

Yeah it feels positive and empowering especially when we're going into social care, social work you know. Like you said before, our work as social care, social workers is we want to tackle inequality and discrimination. If you know some inequalities and discrimination that is happening, you're; more likely to face them, and tackle them, so it kind of empowers us to kind of want to tackle these issues that we have.

Feminist pedagogy gives emphasis to the links between personal and social change as it supports students to see the connections between ideology, power and culture and how to challenge these inside and outside the classroom (Herman and Kirkup, 2017). It can support taking actions to create changes such as those desired by Rosalind, Lena, Cary and Bell above. Briskin (2015:57) discusses what she calls 'Activist Feminist Pedagogies', which contribute empowering strategies to support students to resist in their everyday lives. She advocates teaching towards activism and encouraging students:

> '…to make change in their own communities – work, peer, family, community, and university – and in the spaces and microspaces they inhabit…' (Briskin, 2015: 66).

Such changes are prompted when students' understandings of inequalities are developed, and of course, this understanding is central in social care/work education. Yet, neoliberal reforms mean the social justice and equity goals of the social work curriculum can stand in contradiction to many current higher education practices, and risk being marginalised (Preston and Aslett, 2014; Smith et al., 2018). Feminist pedagogy can support making these principles integral to social work education; this is an aim of my project. Listening to the stories above reminded me of the need to continue to pursue this aim; the stories reinvigorated me as I struggled in the neoliberal context. They reminded me of the necessity for me to also resist and reclaim my teaching spaces in order to pursue the feminist principles guiding my personal and professional life.

7.4 Chapter Conclusion

Resistance and defiance are key concepts in feminist literature and activity, and as chapter 1 indicated, have been responsible for feminism's development. As Allen (1999) contends, feminism must address resistance as a central area of work. In this chapter I have looked at resistance with a specific lens as I have been guided by my data. Stories shared by participants in this study could be shaped as a narrative of resistance and defiance as they recounted their experiences of navigating injustices in their lives. Resistance is hard to define, and it takes forms that are complex, flexible, large and small (Armstrong and Murphy, 2011). Its diversity shows accordance with Foucault's (1984, 1988) conceptualisations of power relations. His work has supported poststructuralists to reinscribe resistance (St Pierre, 2000). This reinscription challenges humanist/rational ideas that resistance is:

> 'Practiced by self-contained, autonomous individuals in response to an oppressive force from the outside, a force that challenges both the natural and political liberty of the individual. In this sense, resistance is thought to

be an act of negation that nullifies or counteracts an infringement of rights' (St Pierre, 2000: 489).

Highly visible and grand forms of feminist resistance and defiance were not evident in stories of participants, reflecting that feminist resistance '…takes different expressions that indicate an assemblage of resistance practices that interact with each other' (Lilja and Johansson, 2018:82). Resisters are 'negotiating at the margins of power, sometimes constrained by but also resisting even undermining asymmetrical power structures' (Davis and Fisher, 1993:6). This means resistance and defiance are not necessarily visible attempts to challenge dominant discourses, they can be in the form of everyday actions (Riessman, 2000). Such actions are individual attempts to exercise agency.

In this chapter, I have presented a range of personal accounts of how participants challenged attempts by others to discriminate against them or undermine them. The feminist classroom facilitated their growing awareness of or awakening to inequalities (I have discussed this in chapter 5), and as part of this they gained confidence to resist and defy. In addition, they came to value this aspect of themselves and many stories were told with pride. Feminist pedagogy can support students towards these directions (Webb et al., 2002; Briskin, 2015; Silva Flores, 2015). In so doing feminist pedagogy moves towards its aim to weaken the foundations of oppressive ideologies (De Welde et al., 2013). As with my explorations in my previous two chapters, I have in this chapter aimed to give emphasis to the contributions of my participants, in doing so I want to avoid disembodying their contributions, but also follow '…the feminist tradition of prioritising women's voices in constructing the narratives of their own experiences' (Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017:16). I add here that I recognise that other marginalised voices are equally deserving of expression, and although the majority of the participants in this study were women, I did work with one African man. I have included his contribution in this chapter too as it is not my intention to silence him either.

Equally important to note as I present these stories here is that I must not over romanticize resistance and defiance stories. Many people have similar

experiences to those told in this chapter, and they have not been able to gain support with their resistance, and strength from the stands they have taken. Without opportunities for solidarity with others and collective action, overthrowing systems, genuine emancipation is not possible (Collins, 1997; 2000; Allen, 1999; Riessman, 2000). This points again to the tension between postmodern/neoliberal perspectives, and those that stress the role of structural elements and how social and economic conditions shape lives. I have discussed these tensions throughout this thesis. However, I will add here that I note, as does Ramazanoglu (1993), that postmodern inclinations to emphasise resistance can produce facile celebrations of it and must be avoided in order to create real social change. Armstrong and Murphy (2011) also stress the danger of ignoring contexts when we celebrate resistance and advise against adopting simplistic interpretations of Foucault's work.

Supporting social change by encouraging students /participants in the direction of social justice arguments was an aim of this project. It was my hope that resistance strategies developed to disrupt inequalities in their own lives would translate into their practice with service users. There was some evidence of this in their stories, it was not as dominant as stories about their own lives, but in this chapter, I have been able to discuss some of the ways in which participants demonstrated their desire to develop emancipatory practices in a social care/work context.

Chapter 8 - Reflexivity and the Research Process: A Concluding Discussion

8.1 Chapter Introduction

In this final chapter I draw together the main arguments I have made throughout the thesis. I present a summary of the key contestations made in each chapter. I have framed this endeavour as a reflexive undertaking; therefore, I begin with an exploration of reflexivity. I discuss reflexivity in relation to reflection and examine how it influenced each stage of the research. As I do this, I revisit my research journey. The journey is then more fully articulated in this chapter as I pull the strands of the thesis together into a coherent discussion. By engaging in this process, this chapter is further used as an opportunity to offer fresh insights into my personal positionality and its role in the research. Amongst other things this enables an examination of how my understandings and interpretations of methodology shifted. Key here is to fully explore how I arrived at narratives which were not my focus at the start of this PhD journey. As part of this I moved from researcher to narrator, this shift is worthy of exploration. Examination of this repositioning then leads me to a consideration of the limitations of the work. Consequently, I critique the research and highlight some of its limitations, finally I make explicit the original aspects and key contributions to knowledge made by this work and suggest directions for future research.

8.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is embedded throughout the thesis but warrants fuller examination as the thesis comes to a close, as there are many aspects of this process that require this. In chapter 3 I identified how in many of the characterisations of feminist research offered by authors, reflexivity features as a pivotal and essential element. Reflexivity takes centre stage for many feminist researchers (Stanley and Wise, 1983, 1993, Fonow and Cook, 1991; Burns and Chantler, 2011; McCormick 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Feminism and feminist research aim to disrupt, challenge, reconceptualise, and transform in order to position gender as a categorical centre, and work to redress inequities and social injustices (Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014). Inevitably this is messy business, and exploring this mess is

part of a deliberate attempt to disavow accounts of research, and social life that present it as orderly and straightforward. Reflexivity is integral to being able to do this. It is a means by which feminist and critical researchers can address the silences and secrets inherent in more sanitised accounts of the research process (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010; Lumsden, 2018).

Researcher involvement is a relevant resource in the research process (Burman, 2006). In addition, reflexivity enables examination of the influences, subjectivities, tensions, contradictions, and complications that must be navigated in order to produce knowledge (Mruck and Breuer, 2003; Doucet and Mauthner, 2006; Lumsden, 2018). This insistence on knowing the knower has been highlighted by feminist epistemologists (Madhok and Evans, 2014). Reflexivity begins with the researcher taking a critical look at their values and attitudes, in order to come to an understanding of how who they are impacts upon what they 'see' and thus on the research (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Reflexivity is emphasised in qualitative studies as they operate in a paradigm that stresses research rests on different epistemological **a**nd ontological assumptions from quantitative assumptions, and is heavily influenced by interpretivism (Bryman, 2012). Reflexivity is the process by which a researcher through processes of reflection can own their subjectivity and be as transparent as possible about how their presuppositions shape the direction of the research (Burman, 2006, Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Hesse- Biber, 2014, Woodiwiss et al., 2017). It can be understood as heightened awareness of how we act in and make sense of the social world (Elliott, 2005). Reflection in the sense of carefully contemplating one's actions leads to reflexivity. Continual critical reflection is necessary in order for this shift in focus to happen, and reflection must be purposeful to result in reflexivity. Reflexivity opens up many possibilities for feminist researchers, and crucially must be engaged in as a critical exercise. As Burman (2006) advocates it must be a rigorous process to resist neoliberal attempts at appropriation that can make it indulgent and superficial.

Therefore, in Chapter 1 of this thesis, I discussed and interrogated my own lived experiences and explored my subjectivities in order to offer transparency to, and

examination of, my various positions. This chapter detailed my engagement with feminism as it storied my experiences, linking them to some of the key trends in the development of Western feminism. I discussed how feminism has always faced challenges and tensions in its evolution. It has experienced many fissures and fractures (Whelehan, 1995; Hoskin et al., 2017), and some debates and difference are irreconcilable (Burman, 2011). It is not a unified and equivocal doctrine, or a finite set of ideas, yet there are many points of convergence in the various feminisms. However, I argued that the complex, heterogeneous and multifarious nature of feminism can be a source for celebration, rather than an excuse to dismiss it or deny its relevance. I did not take a reductive approach to feminism by presenting it as something I am aligned to in a simple and uncritical fashion. I acknowledged it is problematic and my claims and links to it require constant re-evaluation. Indeed, I have detailed in this thesis how I reconceptualised my feminist positions through this research journey. In addition, I argued that feminism has relevance to this project because of my strong and sustained links to it as I have tried to live a feminist life. For me, as for Ahmed (2017:1), the word feminism:

> '… fills me with hope, with energy. It brings to mind loud acts of refusal and rebellion as well as the quiet ways we might have of not holding on to things that diminish us. It brings to mind women who have stood up, spoken back, risked lives, homes, relationships in the struggle for more bearable worlds.'

Women participants in this study shared with me stories about how they had rebelled and refused, and together we shaped their experiences into discussions about feminism. Feminism in this context is envisaged as an ambitious project to challenge all social injustices. Feminism in my view necessities an active engagement with challenging all forms of oppression, and although I had only one male participant in my study, I stress his contribution is of equal value. As an African man living in the United Kingdom, he too regularly faced forms of discrimination that sought to undermine and oppress him.

Acknowledging racism is crucial for feminism. Critiques of white Western feminism from Black and transnational feminists have made a significant contribution to feminism's development (hooks, 1984, 1989, 1994, 2000, Lorde ([1984] 2007; Crenshaw, 1989; Mohanty, 2003; Huckaby, 2013; Nadar, 2014). In Chapter 1 I discussed some of these as they have exposed the ways in which feminism itself has enacted its own exclusions and forms of oppression. This critique has supported a focus on a more intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1991; Cho et al., 2013; Liu, 2019), as 'the converging lines of various forms of oppression' (Kingston, 2018: 42) are better understood. This reflects feminism's capacity to adapt and reshape as it evolves. This is necessary as feminism faces and finds new challenges, and sometimes, old challenges in new clothes, as the current 'MeToo' movement identifies (Brewer and Dundes, 2018; Kingston, 2018; Zacharias, 2018). I argued that this means that earlier feminist debates must be attended to rather than forgotten, dismissed as out of date, or consigned as irrelevant. History shows us we often have to restate feminist claims, albeit in new and different ways to reflect the existing era. Complacency about feminism should be avoided and it is necessary to remain attuned to the many ways it can be disavowed (McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012; David, 2016; Gill, 2016).

In the late 1980s and 1990s threats to feminism came from outside and within, as so-called post theories gained a foothold in intellectual spaces. Initially this led to a crisis in feminism as some of its more solid foundations were shaken by post arguments stressing scepticism about grand theories, rational explanations, and patriarchy's power (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000). A turn to deconstruction that these post theories advocated meant the category of 'woman' was deconstructed to identify that it was a social and cultural construct, having no essential qualities (Poovey, 1988; Woodward and Woodward, 2009; Stott, 2012). Such a claim was a step too far for some who saw feminism as part of the humanist project, rational and modernist (Hartsock, 1990). I elaborated on these debates in Chapter 1 and argued that the tension is not so febrile as it was, as many feminists found possibilities in post ideas (Lather, 1991; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Whelehan, 1995; St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000). However, I also stated that I do not fully embrace a post perspective myself, and prefer a weak version of these theories, in line with other feminists such as Benhabib (1992), Fraser (1995a, 1995b), and Nyman

(2014). Strategic application of post ideas is also possible to help assuage some of the difficulties (Burman, 1990, 2011; Bordo, 1993; Collins, 2000). These debates still need critical examination, not least because of the rise of postfeminism. Postfeminism reflects that postmodern ideas have been appropriated by neoliberal dogma in ways that may seem feminist, but are faux feminism (McRobbie, 2009; Burman, 2011; Scharff, 2012; Rottenberg, 2014; Liu, 2019). Neoliberalism needs postfeminism in order for its masculinising logics of hyperrationality and competitive individualism to survive (Nash, 2013). The scepticism of postmodern ideas can serve the needs of neoliberal academies well, as they limit systemic critique (Mohanty, 2013). I have discussed postfeminism at a number of points in this report. I argued that its links to neoliberalism recast gender equality as an individual project, effectively eliding the role of structural inequalities in people's lives, and this I find particularly objectionable in a social care and social work context. I agree with Morley and Macfarlane (2012) that it is necessary to revisit the feminism/postmodernism nexus and engage in a critical way with postmodernism in order to enhance critical social work practice. This will help counter the ways in which concerns about social justice and equity are being marginalised as neoliberal discourses take precedence.

Feminism's demand for criticality supports me to challenge these neoliberal and postfeminism trends, in addition, like Burman (2011), I resolve some of the tensions by accepting that feminism is a hybrid of both modernist and postmodernist, and constructionist and deconstructionist, and this hybridity can serve as a useful critical resource to mobilise and evaluate knowledge claims, and connect them to practice. The practice I wanted to connect it to in this PhD thesis was mine as a teacher, so I created feminist spaces in which I could work with students to support the aims of this project.

8.3 Feminist Pedagogy: Making Feminist Spaces in Education Settings

Feminist pedagogy, I argued is a critical style of teaching that troubles concepts of transformation, empowerment, emancipation, radicalisation, social justice, and democracy in order to achieve its key aim of creating social change. Feminist

classrooms are diverse and varied (Shrewsbury, 1997; Coia and Taylor, 2013; Light et al., 2015). This means it makes sense to talk of feminist pedagogies (Briskin, 2015). I argued in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis that plurality is vital in feminism and feminist pedagogy, but I also explained that my use of both terms at times in singular forms is for aesthetics. I find the single form more pleasing, and less cumbersome in some written contexts, and do not use it as an attempt to elide the many differences that exist. Bernardini, (2015) makes a related point saying that she uses the single form to reflect instances when different feminist positions share something such a critique of a concept, in her case, the critique of neutral universality in feminist theories.

In Chapter 2 I argued that feminist pedagogy has much to offer social care/work education contexts. It has core values (Webb et al., 2002; Lawson, 2011; Lawrence, 2016), such as power sharing, inclusion of marginalised perspectives (De Welde et al. 2014), ability to empower (Brown, 2009), ability to connect people (Llewellyn and Llewellyn, 2015), ability to create communities (Schniedewind, 1993; Shrewsbury, 1997; Kishimoto and Mwangi, 2009), ability to ability create knowledge rather than deliver it (Coate Bignell, 1996; Morley, 1998; Light et al., 2015), and ability to support critical thinking to produce change (Briskin, 2015).

These features I argued can support teaching in social care/work classrooms as they work to dilute neoliberal claims that dismiss the role of structural inequalities in people's lives, and support the critique necessary for effective social work practice (Webb, 2006; McLaughlin, 2008; Rogowski, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; Fenton, 2016).

Anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive perspectives and practices hold an essential role in social care/work (Sakamoto and Pitner, 2005; BASW 2014; Danso, 2015), and I argued feminist pedagogies can assist here too. The links between social work and feminism have been discussed and explored in Chapters, 1, 2, and 3 of this thesis. These connections have existed for a long time and are deep and sustained (Dominelli, 2002a, 2002b; Phillips and Cree, 2014; Cree and Dean, 2015). The critique that feminism permits, and the

recognition of structural inequalities it entails, supports this field towards a more sensitive understanding of people's circumstances, and a desire to actively challenge the oppression and marginalisation faced by many service users. Feminism can support the politicising of social care/work education that for some is sorely lacking, leading to a sense that there is an urgent need to counter hegemonic notions that stress self-reliance without examining the systemic origins of social and economic injustices (Fenton, 2014, 2016, 2018; Reynaert et al., 2019). As Dore (1994:102) claimed, the liberatory classroom that feminist pedagogy can create means 'social work students experience first-hand the concepts and principles they are expected to apply in their work with clients.' Krane (1991) argued it was imperative for social work students to adopt feminist perspectives in order to sensitise themselves to the structural forces shaping theory research and practice in social work. More recently, Epstein et al., (2018) have advocated feminist pedagogy in social work education as affording a critical perspective that can make visible relations of power and diverse experiences, in order to support understanding of social justice and human rights. Indeed, this is a claim I also make in this thesis.

Feminist pedagogy is of course not an idyll, and in chapter 2 I have also argued that it can involve discomfort as it poses many dilemmas. These dilemmas are not insubstantial, and include concerns about student resistance (Titus, 2000), about how empowering a classroom can be (Ellsworth, 1989), and the need to carefully monitor how power and authority operate (Briskin, 2001; Crabtree and Sapp, 2003; Coia and Taylor, 2013). For feminists of colour these can be tricky terrain (Lee and Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2012). Additionally, learning to be comfortable with paradoxes (Lawson, 2011), and accepting that discomfort is inevitable (do Mar Pereira, 2012) can be added to the mix.

Again, the influences of neoliberal agendas present problems as they can work to hinder the practices of feminist pedagogy (Gill and Donaghue, 2015; Mountz et al., 2015; Rumens, 2018). They can exert powerful influences that work to silence some (Silva Flores, 2015; Lipton and Mackinlay, 2017). Feminist practices are often a direct contradiction of the values of the neoliberal university; meaning precarity, vulnerability and contradiction often sit together for feminists

in such a space (Burton, 2018). However, I navigated these many challenges as I pursued this project and conclude that the rewards that feminist pedagogy bring far outweigh the trials that present themselves. Like Burton (2018), I consider it essential to look for possibilities to create spaces for feminist practice in neoliberal institutions as part of a resistance strategy. Mackinlay (2016) also notes that the contradictions of neoliberalism can present opportunities to subvert and challenge its hegemonic structures. These opportunities, I agree with her, are there for the taking. As feminists we can create spaces for new articulations and new discourses, I hope I have achieved this with this project.

8.4 Turning Aims into a Research Project

Like many other feminist and qualitative research projects, the aims of this work were refined and adapted in response to, and anticipation of, the many factors I had to consider as the work evolved. My three strands of feminism, teaching, and social care/work education remained, but how to connect them, examine and explore them shifted, and the shape of the research altered as I progressed. This can be seen as messiness, but it is a reflection that research; especially feminist research is both a hard and dynamic process (Ackerly and True, 2010a). Consequently, aims that initially included ideas about how best so support adult learners, especially women as learners, to value their life experiences as a source of learning, and how to find ways to engage learners in meaningful discussions about inequalities and injustices with feminist perspectives were articulated as follows:

1. Engage students with feminist perspectives and debates in order to offer some resistance to neoliberalism's dilution of structural inequalities and their impact on people's lives.

2. Support social care and social work students to engage with feminist perspectives as a means to foster critical thinking, which could then translate into more effective practice with service users, by supporting better understanding of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory perspectives.

3. Set up a feminist classroom in the context of my work in order to achieve 1 and 2 above.

4. Advance feminist thinking and contribute a feminist narrative by adding my story to the existing literature.

These aims reflect the centrality of feminism to the project. This focus was initially not centre stage, as I have said in earlier chapters, while my allegiance to feminism was strong, my belief that a project centralising it would constitute a PhD project was weak. Post arguments had shaken my confidence, I struggled too to find support for such a project in terms of supervisors. I directed initial attempts to complete a PhD thesis around disability lines, persuaded that we were indeed in a postfeminist era that meant gender was not a site for exploring inequalities, but disability marginalisation was. However, as I persisted with my desire to work with feminist perspectives and concepts, and as the project progressed, participants' positive responses to feminism and other events that took over such as the 'Me Too' movement, gave me confidence in terms of the sense that I could defend such a project.

Nevertheless, I engaged in what has been termed a 'crisis of representation' (Elliott, 2005:154) brought about by postmodern claims that reality is relative and constructed. As humanist and modernist projects such as feminism were heavily critiqued from a range of quarters, the qualitative research they were developing was increasingly troubled by claims that research does not produce descriptions of reality, rather it is itself a construction of reality. I turned to narrative where I found resolutions to some of these issues. This meant I moved from researcher to narrator, a process which according to Elliott (2005) requires reflexivity, which can act as a means to rescue qualitative work from the extreme excesses of relativism and postmodernism. Many aspects of post arguments troubled me, and I have explored them more fully in Chapter 1 and returned to them again in subsequent chapters of this thesis. As I became more entangled with narrative I became an interpreter of the many perspectives on display, and increasingly

recognised '… narratives don't speak for themselves, offering a window into an "essential self "' (Riessman, 2008:3).

This recognition that research findings are not reflections *of* the world but *on* how the world can be experienced and conceptualised, opens up reflexive moments for the researcher and so '… fieldwork becomes a space where researchers' identities play a major role in constructing, and portraying to others, meanings' (Mura and Sharif, 2015: 828). The reflexive framework guiding this final chapter is supporting me to give a better account of my research journey as I bring this thesis to an end. To continue this process of consciously writing myself into the text (Fonow and Cook, 2005) and exploring how my subjectivities became entangled with the lives of the participants and other elements on the journey I now offer a concluding and reflexive discussion of my research processes.

8.5 Doing Feminist Research

In Chapter 3, I discussed my research process as I sought to establish a feminist classroom to achieve my research aims. I argued that feminist research principles were a suitable way to conduct this project. These approaches to research wrestle with many of the same debates that feminist theory and feminist pedagogy concern themselves with; indeed, all of their origins are entangled. A singular prototype for an ideal type of feminist research does not exist (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011). Feminist research is not mono cultural, and much diversity exists; yet key principles are discernible (Reinharz, 1992; Waller, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Power and authority in the research process are closely attended to (Hesse-Biber, 2012), and this has been more fully explored in chapter 3.

Ethics is closely aligned to discussions about power in research encounters, and in feminist research, ethics are deeply embedded with epistemology and methodology (Ackerly and True, 2008; Bell, 2014). As I discussed ethics in Chapter 3, I used critical reflexivity to interrogate my practices. I shared concerns I faced as I held the dual role of teacher and researcher. At times, as I pursued this project, this brought into focus differing agendas. For example, as students

lost interest in the project, or other pressures on their time took precedence, my anxiety levels increased. I too was feeling the pressure to complete this project in a timely fashion. I resolved that it was more important to work in line with feminist principles than it was to achieve the perfect research project. Such an aim is of course elusive anyway. I argued that when working with participants and students, and forging the necessary relationships to make this successful, a feminist ethic of care must prevail. I argued that reciprocity was essential to me as an ethical practice, and therefore I was not comfortable with the idea of working with students without offering them something in return. I supported their applications for postgraduate study on Social Work courses and used this as a springboard to engage with discussions about inequalities, injustices anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices in social care/work. How feminism could have a role in these discussions was also highlighted. All students benefitted from the support, but some were not able to reciprocate by staying with my study. This troubled me, but I resolved to focus on those who were able to offer a fuller commitment. It was more important to me that I was not exploiting situations by allowing my interests to take priority (Paradis, 2000). After all, it was not unreasonable of them to access the support I offered without any strings, as a teacher that is the service I offer.

According to Ackerly and True (2010b: 464) 'since the 1970s, feminist research has been activism–engaged, theory building, and methodologically innovative.' I attempted to follow this tradition in this research. Using a feminist action research model, I created a feminist classroom in which I could work with students to encourage their engagement with feminism as a critical theory, and nurture feminist perspectives. It was my contention that such an opportunity would be useful to students, as it would assist their learning, and it could also be applied in their practice when they engaged with service users in social care/work contexts. In chapter 3 I have detailed how I set this up.

After a period of time working in the feminist space we had created, students acted as participants and provided data as they completed reflective journals and participated in interviews and focus groups. This entailed a qualitative approach. Feminist research and qualitative paradigms have much in common as they aim

for many similar goals (Oakley, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011 Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2014). As Gray et al., (2015) and Rizvi (2019) note, both recognise socio-political contexts, value open ended, in-depth and holistic representations, and according to Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010) both support egalitarian research relationships. I argued that the application of qualitative methods in this research context better suited my research ambitions and furnished me with many opportunities to conduct meaningful research aligned to my feminist principles.

In keeping with the reflexivity framework guiding this chapter, critical reflection has enabled me to review the methods, and claims that I adhered to feminist research principles. Reflexivity involves critical examination and critical analysis of the nature of the research and the role of researcher (Elliott, 2005), I do this now. The methods used in this study, especially how I conducted the interviews and focus groups were employed in ways that fell back on standard research practices. I applied a model of interviewing that has informed social research for decades. This approach has been revaluated and resulted in transformations to how the roles of interview participants are played, as well as the nature of interview information and its relationship to society (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). While I turned to narrative as this work progressed, initially, I was ignorant of what narrative approaches could offer and how well they would have suited this project. Narrative interviewing provides '… an opportunity to prioritise the story teller's perspective rather than imposing a more specific agenda' (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016:631). Comparing the semi-structured nature of the interviews and focus groups I conducted with those that employ more narrative methods, I have realised I did not give control to interviewees in terms of direction, pace and the content of the interviews. Riessman (1993) discusses the difficulties interviewers can face in terms of giving up control in the interview, this resonates with me. Earlier engagement with narrative interviewing techniques would have supported me to engage more fully with facilitating participants to have more control, and consequently more truly practice feminist research values. Additionally, it would have assisted me to recognise that participants are not repositories of facts, experiences, reflections and opinions, they are participants

in a social encounter where knowledge is actively created (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012).

I have mentioned previously how disappointed I was when transcribing to be faced with the realisation that I had talked too much in exchanges with participants. Narrative interviewing could have helped me avoid this. I believe now that I showed a tendency to be overzealous and I justified this as an attempt to avoid over burdening the participants. I have also framed this as a further example of the dual role scenario I faced in this research. I have claimed that the teacher role took precedence over the researcher role but in honesty the feminism that I claimed guided both areas of practice should have permitted me to give opportunities rather than assume and prejudge how involved the participants might have wanted to be in the project. This tendency to presumption I showed again when I did not pursue participants or encourage them to provide data in more than one way. For example, with cohort one, admittedly, I originally anticipated this would be a pilot study group, but I assumed that after participating in a fairly long focus group discussion, they would not be very willing to take part in individual interviews. In so doing, I have denied them the opportunity to play a fuller part in the study. I asked for participation only once and it may have been possible to be more open here, as with hindsight, the enthusiasm shown for discussion in the focus group could have been harnessed for an individual interview. I could too have been more assertive in asking them to provide a reflective journal, only one of this group supplied one. This has also resulted in limiting the data. Additionally, cohort 1 could have offered valuable insights into groups and community experiences that could have supported the analysis offered in Chapter 6, where I explored the narrative of 'Care and Nurture'. As I have said, they came to the study as an established group, having realised that support from and support give to each other would assist how they survived their university experience. Therefore, I need to ask did I unintentionally create inequities while not trying to? Briskin (2001) discusses how the power dynamics in a feminist classroom can create inequities, despite claims to empower. Further, Ellsworth's (1989:297) 'repressive myths' once more come to mind now. The tensions that power and authority create in a feminist classroom have been discussed in Chapter 2, these

tensions are very evident to me now in my hindsight as I practice critical reflection.

Additionally, I believe my understanding of ethics restricted my approach. I was overly concerned to be seen as not coercing and I struggled with the power and authority invested in me as I was both teacher to the participants and researcher. Participants had experienced me first as a teacher, so both parties were responding to a changed role, and the expectations invested in the teacher role were difficult for all involved to ignore. The feminist action research element of the study therefore threw into focus the dual roles which created feminist challenges that I could have addressed better. These are limitations of the research and I further explore their implications later in this chapter.

My turn to narrative that has prompted this reflection happened most significantly as I considered how to analyse my data. In order to keep constancy with feminist principles, I looked for a method of data analysis that was concomitant with these values. Fortunately for me, the Listening Guide emerged as a method that would suit my needs. The Listening Guide (LG) has its roots in feminism (Brown and Gilligan, 1993; Woodcock, 2016). In particular, 'Second Wave' feminist ideals are embedded and instrumental in its development (Mauthner, 2019b). As I have argued in Chapter 4, it served as a powerful means to enable me to give comprehensive attention to the contributions of my participants. It is an intense and time-consuming method to use, but it produces enormous benefits as it has power and reach. My sample was relatively small as I had contributions from only thirteen participants. This took the form of seven reflective journals, (eight if I include my own), five interviews, and six focus group interviews. The LG enabled me to get the necessary depth of detail required despite not having as much breadth as I initially hoped for. I overlooked this method when I first learned of it as I did not think I had stories, I recognised that the interviews and focus groups had been focussed around my agenda and I knew my approach could have been more unstructured and better facilitated story telling. However, as I engaged more with the data and I learned more about the method I became convinced it would serve my purposes. I did indeed have stories as telling stories is what people constantly do as a process of making sense or giving meaning to

experiences (Bochner and Riggs, 2014). Riessman (1993) described telling stories as a universal human activity that starts in childhood. She asserted:

> 'Research interviews are no exception. Respondents (if not interrupted with standardized questions) will hold the floor for lengthy turns and sometimes organize replies into long stories' (Riessmann,1993:3).

The method's links with Carol Gilligan, whose work in Psychology I had always admired, held a strong appeal for me too when I first began reading about the method. Although as I progressed my application of the method I moved from the Brown and Gilligan (1992,1993) version towards the versions discussed by Mauthner and Doucet (1998), Doucet and Mauthner (2008) and Mauthner (2019a, 2019b), I, like these authors, value Gilligan's work in using this method to support the hearing of women's voices, a necessary corrective at the time she developed it. The later more sociological versions helped me traverse the impasse I had reached as the crisis of representation brought about by post arguments (discussed earlier) supported me towards a narrative turn. Furthermore, and importantly, I realised that reshaping my work as narrative inquiry and using the LG as part of this would support me to address my research aims. The feminist action research approach taken in this study is consistent with many aspects of narrative approaches, and I explored their interconnections more fully as I concluded chapter 4.

The LG requires multiple listenings/readings of one's data in order to access the multiple layers of an informant's communication (Forrest et al., 2015). This gives it its potency, and the repeated engagement I had with my data illuminated many aspects in the stories participants shared about their experiences outside and inside university, thoughts on and connections to feminism, how our feminist space was being received and the influences it was having on them.

The application of the method takes time to adjust to, and accounts of its use in the literature can be contradictory, and at times confusing. As a first-time user of this method I struggled at first. However, once I allowed myself to be comfortable with its flexibility and accept, I was not following a recipe, I gained confidence.

Additionally, the repeated engagement with participants' stories brought them back into my present. When it came to the data analysis stages, all participants had moved on, most to the postgraduate training in social work they desired. Some data was collected in the early stages of this too as we met to catch up and reflect. The participants' enthusiasm and interest in the project was a major motivation for me to continue. Listening to, and reading their words repeatedly as required by the method was heart-warming. Formulating I-poems from their words was particularly moving, and it supported the development of my listening skills. I will take this to my future teaching contexts. This stage of the LG brings the researcher into a more meaningful relationship with the participant (Brown and Gilligan, 1993); I certainly found that to be true. My reflexive stance emerged in a much more significant way as I engaged with this method. Doucet (2008), Mauthner and Doucet (1998) and Doucet and Mauthner (2008) stress the reflexive elements this method affords the researcher. The relational ontology at the core of the LG ties to reflexivity by enabling better understanding of both speaker and listener and their responsive relationship (Brown and Gilligan, 1992,1993; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Reflexivity therefore leads to a deeper and more nuanced engagement with the data resulting in better understandings of it.

As proper engagement with reflexivity requires a critical stance, it is therefore important to critique the LG too. I have already highlighted how its entanglements with 'Second Wave' feminist ideas have been critiqued and resulted in modifications to the use of the method. Critics have identified its origins as essentialist, and its assumption that it gave voice to women and allowed unmediated access to women's lives as problematic (Mauthner, 2019a, 2019b). Additionally, the I-poem aspect of the method although lauded by some as a significant shift from other qualitative methods of analysis (Gilligan, 2015), the method's most distinctive feature (Woodcock, 2016) and a means to access the different subjectivities a participant speaks from (Edwards and Weller, 2012), can be critiqued. Use of 'I' it has been claimed is a Western figure of speech meaning the method may not have global reach, as it is more reflective of cultures that stress individualism (Mauthner, 2019b). It is important too to ensure I-poems are not divorced from their context, and used too selectively, however

tempting it may be to do this. Smith and Lockwood (2019) caution against stripping stories from their context. They ask users of the method to use reflexivity to ask critical questions about whose stories are being heard and whether or not entrenched power relations are being enacted in how stories are abstracted and decontextualised.

Such critiques aside, I argued that this method of data analysis went a significant way to supporting the feminist ambitions of this project and to ensure I acknowledged the contribution of participants in a way that avoided superficiality, disembodying, and gave genuine opportunities for their stories to be heard. As I worked to bring all the steps of the LG into a relationship with each other and linked this to the research aims I was able to frame them into three overarching narratives. I have discussed these three separately in Chapters, 5, 6 and 7. However, before offering a concluding examination of the findings I first explore the limitations of the study.

8.6 Limitations of the Study

Reflexivity requires that we remain alert to our own assumptions (Burman, 2006) and as such is a means to confront ourselves (Doucet and Mauthner, 1998). In order to do this, it is necessary to engage in what Pillow (2003) referred to as the uncomfortable aspect of reflexivity, and critique aspects of my work.

Methodologically there are a number of areas where the study could be improved. A number have already been highlighted in this chapter. As discussed above, narrative interviewing as a method could have afforded me opportunities to more fully practice the values of feminism that I hold dear and have claimed guided this project. Additionally, even for qualitative work the sample of participants is limited both in size and by the fact that all were recruited from only one programme of study (albeit 3 cohorts from this programme). This has limited the data set, and I have further limited it by not pursuing participants and providing them with other opportunities to contribute. The dual researcher – teacher role that I have discussed at times in this thesis also resulted in limitations. The teacher role won in this tussle and had I been more researcher

focussed elements of the methodology could have been enhanced. The investment I already had in the participants as students provided unexpected challenges and resulted in some of the study's limitations. Having said that, the pressures of a PhD and the requirement to meet time constraints further highlighted the difficulties that are entailed when trying to fulfil feminist principles in this context. Despite claims I have made to follow feminist research values in aspects of this project I have not been consistent with some of these values. Finally, had I turned to narrative earlier I may have had a very different project. In comparison with standard methods, narrative methods can more effectively capture a fuller range of human experiences (Mauthner, 2017).

8.7 Turning Stories Shared into Narratives

Narrative can be used to support making sense of how participants give meaning to actions and give account of their experiences. Elliott (2005: 3) offered the following definition of narrative from Hinchman and Hinchman:

> 'Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it.'

A single definition of narrative should, however, be avoided in order to not restrict the variety this approach affords as it represents that lives matter (Woodiwiss et al., 2017). Riessman (2008) argues that narratives do not establish truth, rather they serve a constitutive function, they are reports and reflections on events. They can also serve to constrain or enable certain stories at particular times (Lockwood, et al., 2019). They became attractive in social research in the 1990s to researchers looking for ways to make human sciences more human in the context of the crisis of representation (Bochner and Riggs, 2014). As discussed previously I turned to narrative at the analysis stage of this study. Feminist thoughts and debates have contributed significantly to this form of inquiry and are closely linked to its development (Woodiwiss et al., 2017). In this context I used 'narrative' to mean a framework for the stories and experiences participants

shared. I constructed 3 overarching narratives within which to encase the data into coherent themes. Casting experiences in narrative form is a primary way for people to make sense of their experiences (Riessman, 1993), I made sense of the data in this study by generating overarching narratives to the stories I bore witness to.

I termed the narrative I discussed in chapter 5 'Awakenings and Transformations', as after careful consideration this seemed to be the best term to provide a composite of their expressions in relation to how they had revised their views on feminism, its relevance to their lives, and its ability to support their work in social care/work settings. I argued that this narrative, as with the other two ('Care and Nurture' and 'Resistance and Defiance') are my interpretations, I have fashioned them, I am not claiming to have unearthed authentic truths. As Smith (2017) claims, such narratives serve as a way to shape stories.

I opined that this narrative reflects participants' increasing engagement with feminism and moves they made to develop feminist subjectivities. Many participants expressed they now had a willingness to call themselves feminists and felt comfortable defending this position. Their views on feminism and feminists had changed as we worked in the feminist classroom. I argued that this was not a fixed space but became a term I used to describe all my interactions with the participants once the project started and as it progressed.

Their awakening to feminism and what it can offer led to transformations. Some identified immediate benefits, Adrienne, for example, saw how in her personal life things had improved as she started to better understand the politics of relationships. In addition, Bell and Miriam shared stories about how they were better at spotting inequalities, and how feminism helped them interpret them. Taking this awareness into social care/work practice was also evident as participants recognised how a feminist lens can support better understandings of the different ways injustices impact on the lives of service users. Kimberle, for example reinterpreted her work on placement in a women's prison in light of new understandings about gender inequalities.

In chapter 6 I discussed the narrative of 'Care and Nurture'. That this should feature was particularly pertinent to the social care/work context, and therefore pleasing for me. Participants shared stories about how they felt cared for and supported in the feminist space. This for many was in stark contrast to the neoliberalism that had moulded their university experience so far. Kimberle talked of 'faceless lecture halls', in which people choose silence. Patricia also spoke of silence as a survival strategy, Audre described feeling admonished by lecturers who present rules without compassion, and Nancy lamented that after three years with a tutor they still did not know her name.

I was boosted when they reported that our space had been welcoming, as this was the kind of feminist classroom I wanted to create. I was happy that by embracing ideas about feminist pedagogy I had played 'a role in countering the alienating rhetoric of the 'enterprise' university, where intellectual capital is standardised and controlled' (Nash, 2013: 421). By incorporating affective, emotional and experiential elements into the learning context feminist pedagogy replaces classroom competitiveness with communal, collective and collaborative forms of learning (Briskin, 1990). This means personal connection and mutuality can develop in such spaces (hooks, 1994; Smith-Adcock et al., 2004). Participants in this study had a sense of community, for one cohort it was prompted by the feminist classroom we worked in, and they shared accounts of how they grew close to one another. For another cohort, as mature Black African students they were already in a supportive set up as they responded to the challenges in the learning context. These challenges include the exclusionary practices evident in neoliberal institutions, which some writers have identified as perpetuating a white, masculinist, and middle-class hegemony (Singh, 2015; Phiri, 2015; Morley, 2016; Liu, 2019). Becoming a collective has been shown to be an effective strategy to counter a sense of non-belonging created by neoliberal discourses of individuality (Mountz et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 2017). Although they came to me as a collective, they still appreciated the feminist space and the opportunities it provided for them. As I have discussed in chapter 6, not all participants were able to forge communities, and my third cohort did not demonstrate the bonds evident in the other two groups. This was for a number of reasons, but I contend that the neoliberal context played a part. For this cohort it

was evident that instrumental strategies were at play as a response to the alienating effects of neoliberalism. As a group they did not value the feminist space, and preferred to work with me individually, and on their own terms.

Participants who did value the feminist space for its ability to bring people together talked of it feeling safe, and comfortable, and this facilitated bonding and a sense of community. This also encouraged sharing, and as writers about feminist pedagogy note, such sharing serves as a means to value individual experiences and knowledge (Weiler, 1991; hooks, 1994; Crabtree and Sapp, 2003; Robinson- Keilig et al., 2014). The sharing of stories often led to discussion about social care/work practice as participants discussed work with service users. A clear sense of empathy with service users was evident in these discussions as was a critique of ways of working in this field that promote neoliberal perspectives.

A feminist ethic of care guided the work we engaged in whilst in the feminist classroom. This was not to perpetuate essentialist ideas about women and caring, but more in line with Tronto's (1993, 2013) model. Her work argues that care is a political and a moral practice. I argued that such a perspective is vital to instil in social care/work students. Like Tronto, it is my contention that care is a human value, a central activity for human life, however, it has always been a politicised context, and in order to fully understand it we need to recognise this. It has been devalued and degraded as part of efforts by those in power to maintain power and privilege. This must be challenged, but not at the cost of foregoing care. This challenge is a form of resistance, and this was the final narrative I discussed in this thesis.

In Chapter 7 I explored the narrative of 'Resistance and Defiance' in the stories participants shared. I argued that resistance and defiance hold central places in feminism, and there is a wider literature that explores this relationship. In this context participants shared stories of more personal or everyday resistance strategies that they had employed, and that the feminist classroom gave them confidence to continue to employ. Foucault's (1984, 1988) ideas about how power operates have some relevance here, and I argued that participants'

contributions can be interpreted in terms of his idea that power is evident in all spaces, and this being the case, resistance is always present and possible too.

Most stories pertinent to this narrative related tales of specific instances where sexism or racism was on display. Participants claimed that discussions in the feminist classroom gave them motivation to resist and defy in these circumstances and call out the discrimination. In some cases, they referred to relationships within their families or work situations, and a sense of pride was evident as these stories were shared and participants enjoyed discussing how they had undermined power. In other scenarios resistance took the form of silences as participants talked of strategies they had devised over time, this can also be a useful tactic in resistance (Gatwiri and Mumbi, 2016).

Some examples were presented that reflected acts of challenge intentionally directed against power relations operating more widely in society. Audre for example, shared her story of her experiences of modern slavery, and her words offered some powerful commentary about the capacity of the human spirit to resist and defy attempts to dismiss and disempower. Likewise, Adrienne's accounts of her treatment by a psychiatrist present a moving story of the importance of shunning attempts to apply damaging labels and deny a person their dignity. I argued that such accounts despite their uplifting potential need to be acknowledged in the context that not all individuals in such circumstances can express such agency and be successful. I contended, like Collins (1997), Allen (1999) and Riessman (2000), that solidarity is essential to feminist goals, as it is not an individual practice, but a collective endeavour.

Its collective and collaborative potentials support it to resist neoliberal attempts at appropriation and co-option. I therefore stated that resistance is a key part of this thesis as I see my work as an act of resistance. It is my ambition that my work has gone someway to thwarting attempts to 'ensure that academic work maintains a neoliberal status quo by actually having no real political impact' (Rhodes, et al., 2018:139). The political impact of my work is I hope evident. Additionally, I consider the following to be the key contributions I have made in this work.

8.8 Contributions Made by the Study

The study has made contributions in a number of areas and to differing extents. Firstly, I am confident I can argue that in relation to my research aim of advancing feminist thinking by contributing a feminist narrative, adding my stories provides a different authorial voice to the chronicle of feminism's development. The detailed examination of the stories of participants in this study also means further authorial voices that contribute stories of feminism and identifying as and becoming a feminist have been offered. Knowledge has therefore been created to add to the existing body.

Additionally, by exploring what it means to teach when guided by feminist principles I have contributed knowledge and understandings of feminist pedagogies, and how to incorporate these as acts of resistance in neoliberal organisations. This reflects achievement of research aims 1 and 3.

Through the research practices and the reflexivity, I have engaged in, I have illuminated aspects of feminist research practices, and ideas about how to negotiate and navigate the terrain. The Feminist Action Research strategy I employed combined with narrative approaches has the potential to support the building of research practices that are ethically robust and offer research rigour. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are interconnections between action research approaches and narrative inquiry. Features they share such as reflexivity, emphasis on relationship, cooperation, participation, and assumptions about knowledge as a co-creative process in the social world connect and support alliances. This study has contributed a further example of how such connections can be exploited. Aspects of narrative method can be employed in ways that give analytical strength in action research (Toledano and Anderson, 2017). Pushor and Clandinin (2009) also identify the close connection story telling has to growth and change. These authors discuss how changes produced through action research can be more fully and explicitly articulated through the storytelling that narrative inquiry entails. This then could improve the ability of researchers to share with others the possibilities for action. Knowledge about such possibilities and the potential for robustness and rigour in research of this sort has also been

contributed here through the sharing of a detailed account of how I turned to narratives as I applied the Listening Guide to the data at the analysis stage. In doing this I have supported the development of insights into the use of this method that future researchers may find useful.

The major strength in this work and what gives it its uniqueness and originality lies in the new knowledge it contributes to the value of feminist classrooms in social care/work contexts. This links to the second research aim. The criticality so desired in order for effective practice in these areas can be supported by engagement with feminist perspectives. This can create powerful exchanges and changes to the ways in which practitioners work with service users, producing mutual benefits. I used feminist perspectives to have broad conversations with potential social workers about anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices. Supporting such social justice mandates is vital for the profession which holds a crucial role in campaigning to challenge unjust policies and practices. Feminism as a perspective challenges subordination in all its forms and leads to social change. The power social workers are afforded as they access service users' lives must be properly understood and responsibly negotiated as they work with service users facing multiple and intersecting inequalities. This study unequivocally demonstrates the importance of mobilising towards social justice and social change especially in the context of neoliberalist agendas shaping lives. This work is asking for social care/work education to embrace opportunities to think beyond predominant neoliberal paradigms and in the case of social work reclaim its links to feminism and other radical stances with a refocus of its lenses.

Through this work I wanted to give teaching the emphasis it deserves and for it not to be seen as less important than research, as 'a duller, less valuable aspect of the academic profession' (hooks, 1994: 12). Like hooks (1994:12) I see the classroom as 'the most radical space of possibility in the academy'. I want to see a renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. It is important to me that rather than end on a defeatist note I end this thesis with hope that there is much fertile ground for future work in this area to exploit the possibilities academic activism presents. There is much to be optimistic about in terms of feminism, feminist pedagogy and feminist research, especially in the contexts of social

care/work education. This positivity combined with the new knowledge gained will guide the next steps of this research. These next steps could be in the direction of taking the approaches to teaching and research explored here to a wider audience of students, peers and colleagues through publications and collaborative projects with others who share the project's ambitions.

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